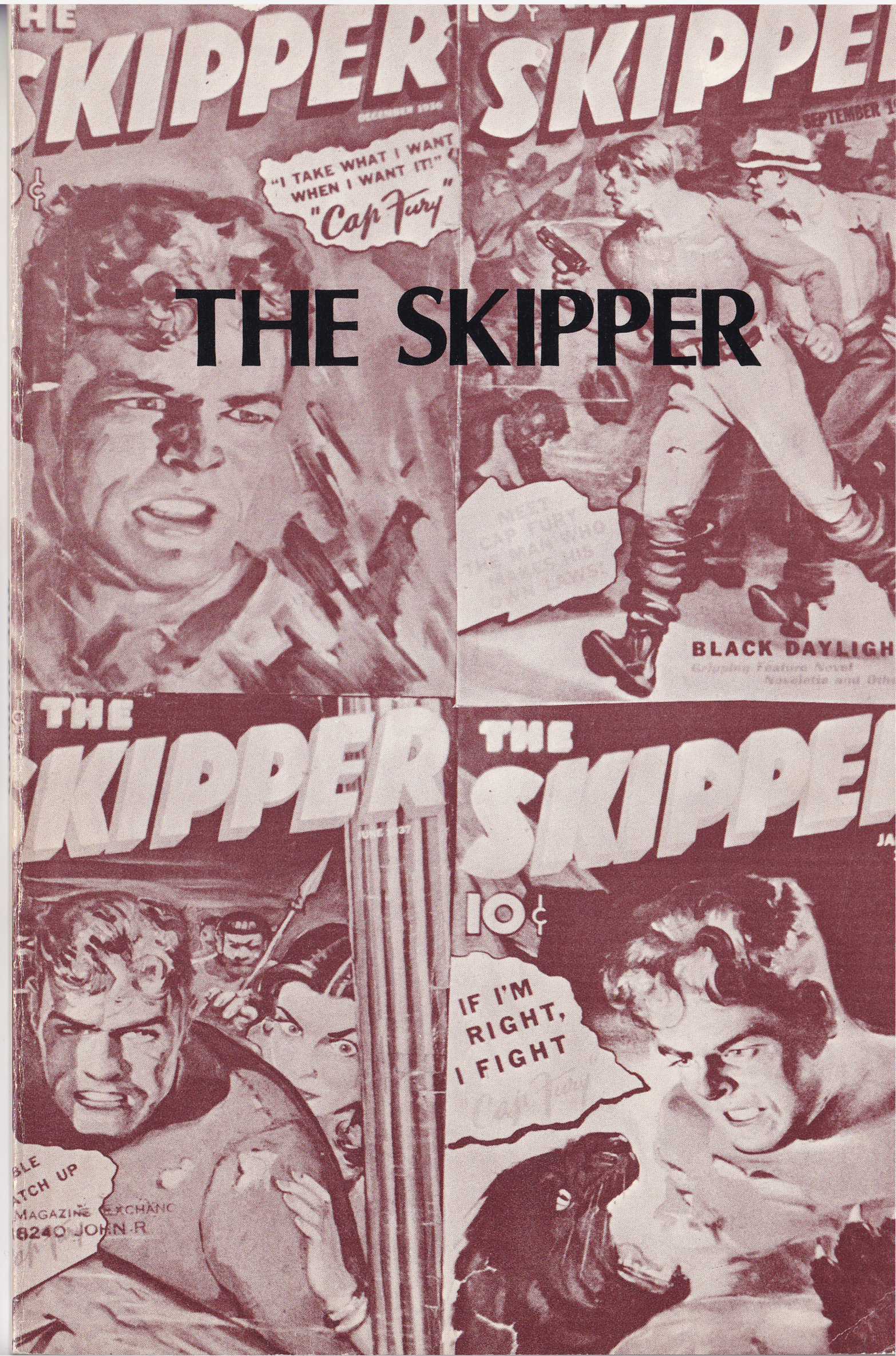
THE SKIPPER
"I TAKE WHAT I WANT WHEN I WANT IT!" "Cap Fury"
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IF I'M RIGHT, I FIGHT

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The Editors

Breathless Island

Men clutch their throats and pitch forward to instant death, when the choking death strikes. All men except Cap Fury!

By

WALLACE BROOKER

A Book-length Novel

CHAPTER I.

THE VANISHED BULLETS.

THE pompous man died as quickly as the others. His stiff dignity could not save him. He had an arrogant air of owning a good slice of the earth, but he fell with the six other men. So he became only one of seven murdered lumps of flesh lying upon the small boat wharf of Biscayne Bay.

Many persons witnessed the death of the pompous man and the six others. These were in the small crowd restrained by the police from thronging out on the little wharf. Most of these persons knew the pompous man as Royer Stannus, political power and candidate for United States senator. For those who had not before seen him, the bearing of the big man would have marked him for the figure he was expected to be.

For Royer Stannus wore his iron-gray hair in what might be described as a politician's pompadour. It was

combed straight back from a high and massive forehead. His jaw was square, and his eyes had the quality of always looking down upon lesser men. A smile on his big face was fixed and tolerant.

His smile was still fixed as the mouth sagged and the pompous man died. Likewise, the mouths of his six companions on the little wharf seemed to gasp for air of which their lungs might suddenly have been robbed.

The manner of the seven deaths, seven murders as they turned out to be, was as if lightning had struck. Indeed, there was some lightning at the moment. Black clouds had massed over the ocean. These had drifted across the long island on which lies Miami Beach.

Biscayne Bay mirrored dark masses of moving shadows in its calm, blue water. Electricity flared intermittently with growls of thunder. Soon, the sunset rain squall would slash the tropical park along the bay back of the murder wharf.

Such squalls break suddenly over Miami. They last for minutes, an hour; then they pass. The approach of the storm had diminished the crowd there to look upon the important person of Royer Stannus. Had there been any forecast that the landing of the party was to be an assassination, the bayside would have been packed. But no warning was given.

Yet those who were there neither wished to linger nor enjoyed the hideous spectacle. The crowd swayed, turned back upon itself as the seven men fell. Those in the front line jammed into those nearest to them.

From under the edge of the little wharf, apparently originating in a speed boat of the hydroplane type, came crackling explosions. A machine gun, was the crowd's thought. Some screamed their belief as they hastened to remove themselves from a possible line of death bullets.

ALL of the seven victims were at the outer end of the small wharf. It was one used for the landing of launches and tenders from the winter row of millionaires' yachts anchored in the middle holding ground of Biscayne Bay. The Royer Stannus yacht, the *Flamingo,* was at the end of the row of the anchored boats.

It had been reported Stannus was coming ashore to attend a local club dinner. Two policemen were meeting the launch. Two other policemen attended to the crowd, perhaps fifty yards away. Three yacht sailors had come with the Stannus launch. One other man was the Stannus secretary, a small, gray little man.

These, the two policemen, the three sailors, the secretary and Stannus, apparently were in the direct line of the explosions from the speeding hydroplane. None of the victims fell into the bay. All staggered drunkenly, their hands clawing. Some seemed to grab at the empty space of the air.

Others caught at their throats, tearing their collars, as if that might ease the death agony. Not one man screamed before he died. Nor did any of the seven heave or move with the convulsions usually resulting from bullet wounds.

As the seven fell, the squally sky over the bay was split by a flaring blast. Perhaps those in the crowd imagined this to be a thunderbolt hurled from the clouds. But no lightning ball ever burst with such an awesome rocking of the earth.

For seconds, a shuddering vacuum hovered over the tropical park and the bay. This was followed by a tremendous, ear-shattering rush of air under a terrific impact. Human eyes were incapable then of recording details of the catastrophic happenings.

The *Flamingo,* the luxurious, white yacht of Royer Stannus, was in the center of the explosion. Its slim wireless

masts sprang from their deck holdings. The cabin superstructure of the yacht seemed to dissolve and become a part with the racing squall clouds.

Simultaneously with, or within seconds of the murder of the men who had come ashore, the yacht *Flamingo* was torn asunder, blasted into separated stern and bow. What remained of the yacht on the water sank immediately. Other upper parts merged apparently with the low clouds, then rained down over a wide area.

The rain of the squall slashed upon all this, further confusing any man who might have remained calm enough to observe details. Then the first shocked hush of the fleeing crowd broke into screams of panic. Even the two policemen who had escaped the grim fate of their companions were momentarily engaged, swept back with the crowd from the little murder wharf.

Only one man on all the Biscayne Bay front remained stolidly planted on immovable feet. He had not shifted his position a single inch. Only his right hand moved. Around and around it went, keeping even time, slowly, carefully spacing such a record of death as had never before been chronicled on the film and sound track of a movie camera.

JAMES "BUMPS" McCARTHY was a roundish, heavy young man. Rain of the squall glistened on the fiery-red hair of his bared head. He was getting the picture of a lifetime—a lifetime in the years of any news-reel cameraman. It was a film of murder and catastrophe, produced solely by the accident of unexpected disaster in what had started out to be merely the recording of a civic welcome to a noted political figure.

Bumps McCarthy had the camera's eye on Royer Stannus when the explosive crackling had come from the hydroplane. The ace cameraman of Super-World News Films had showed excitement only by the sudden pursing of his round, good-humored mouth. the glinting of small eyes in his moonlike face.

He had the camera planted on the roof of an automobile parked just off the little wharf. This enabled him to shoot it over the heads of the crowd. When he saw Royer Stannus waver and fall, saw six others staggering and slumping into inert huddles of death, Bumps's slowly grinding crank did not vary the fraction of a second from the proper recording for the uncertain light of the sunset storm.

So, when the yacht *Flamingo* was blown up, it was by chance in the direct range of the camera's eye. The natural light was not so good for distance, but the momentary glare of the explosion itself helped to trap some details human eyes could never have recorded.

Bumps McCarthy's breath hissed from his rounded lips. If only this coming of the rain squall had not cut off too much of the picture. It was part of the coolness of this remarkable cameraman that he was thinking no other news-reel man had ever had such a shot.

Yes, there was the assassination of a European king that had once been filmed. But nothing to compare with the closeness and clearness of this murder scene, of the disintegration of the Royer Stannus yacht out there in millionaires' row.

The automobile top rocked and trembled under Bumps and his camera. The explosion flare died after an interval of seconds. The owner of the car on which Bumps was planted had the abrupt desire to remove himself from this vicinity. No doubt he overlooked having permitted the cameraman to mount his roof.

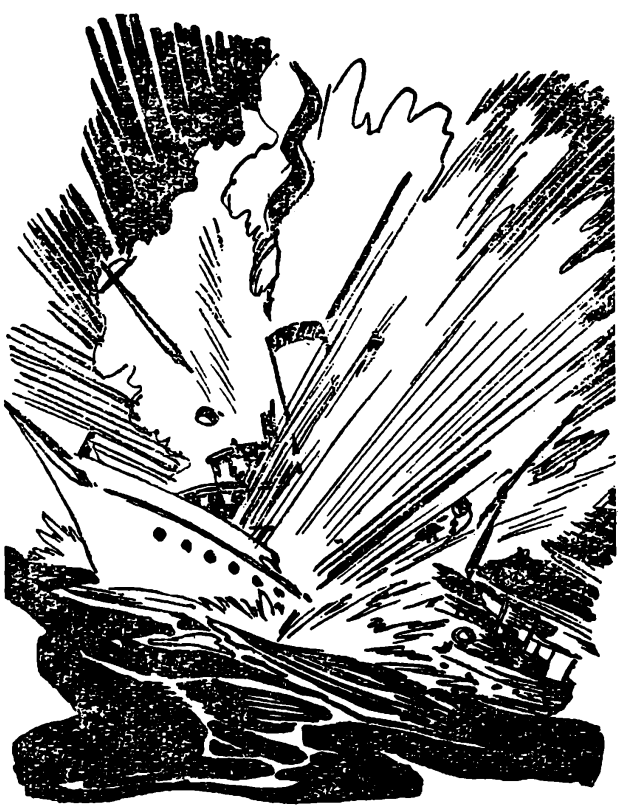
The auto roof moved, jerked suddenly from under Bumps and his camera. Bumps gritted an oath, wrapped his bulky arms around the precious film box and rolled off. He saved the camera

by taking the jolt in the driveway on the rear portions of his fat body.

When Bumps scrambled to his feet, the rain squall had broken with full force. The comparatively minor explosions of the thunderstorm rumbled over the chaos of death and destruction in the bay.

Bumps had arrived in the park by taxicab. The taxi had departed. The cameraman lugged the picture box to a thick patch of tropical shrubbery and thrust it into concealment.

"Sweet hell!" he muttered. "What a shot! But if the cops think of me having been up there, they'll grab it!"



WITHIN the following few minutes the police had no thought for a stray cameraman having been on the spot. The first arriving coppers were too greatly concerned with the ghastly bodies huddled on the little wharf.

Jumbled, incoherent stories were being related by those of the crowd who had remained. The explanations of the two policemen who had survived were not much more lucid.

"The killers were in a speed boat," said one of the coppers. "Anyway, the shooting come from the bay below the wharf. But we were so jammed up with the scared mob right away, I didn't get anything but a flash of them making a get-away."

Bumps McCarthy edged close to the police squad going to the seven bodies on the wharf. Sheets of rain slashed upon the scene. A police captain gave an order to have an alarm sent out for all speed boats in Biscayne Bay. Bumps recalled he had marked the hydroplane shooting away at high speed.

The cameraman judged the finding of that particular boat might be difficult. There were many hydroplanes, and Biscayne Bay extended for miles. The rain squall and coming night blanketed the water front.

"I didn't get a glimpse of the faces of the men in the boat myself," murmured Bumps, but he grinned a little. "Maybe Old Sure-shot got 'em!"

His own special camera with its advanced sound track with "Old Sure-shot." The eye of the camera had caught much more than the faces of the men in the speed boat. But Bumps would not know this until the film was developed.

That could wait a little while. Bumps wanted to know more of what the police might discover. He had much more than a cameraman's interest in this, for Bumps McCarthy was much more than a cameraman.

He was one of the sworn companions of Captain John Fury, master of the tramp ship *Whirlwind,* then lying at anchor lower down in the bay. And as an associate of this world-famous Skipper, Bumps was devoted to the hunting down of criminals who might be outside the reach of the law.

Thus far, who would know the meaning of those deaths? These murders and the destruction of the Royer Stannus yacht bore all the marks of something greater than a random crime—a crime beyond the scope and power of the police to solve.

If so, Bumps desired to know all that was to be learned. Cap Fury would want to be informed. The Skipper of the *Whirlwind* followed his own methods. Royer Stannus being a noted politician might mean little to Captain John Fury.

But the things Royer Stannus stood for could mean a great deal.

SO Bumps kept unobtrusively close to the police squad on the rain-washed wharf. He was close when he heard the captain's exclamation.

"Great Scott, fellows! There's something decidedly screwy about this; Doc, what's the answer? There ain't any blood!"

The little knot of squad men crowded nearer. None but the medical examiner had touched the bodies. It was natural the doctor should first examine the body of Royer Stannus. And the doctor moved the heavy bulk of the body several times, feeling here and there, staring into the dead man's eyes, listening for the heartbeat which was not there, before he arose.

"You say the machine-gun explosions came from a speed boat?" he whipped at one of the policemen who had been near the scene.

"Sure—well, anyway, they come from the bay," said the copper. "But the crowd was pushin', and Jim an' me was tryin' to get 'em movin'——"

"You didn't see the shooting then? It seems nobody saw the shooting!" the doctor said irritably, bending over the bodies of the two policemen on the wharf.

"Well, we heard it! An' these poor devils got the full burst of it, or they wouldn't be here as they are now!"

The policeman was convinced of the truth of this.

The doctor was compelled to use a flashlight, due to the darkness of the storm. Its pencil ray flitted briefly from the face of one corpse to another. The medical examiner addressed the puzzled police captain

"I wouldn't be in too big a hurry having that speed boat grabbed, captain! I'm not saying there wasn't shooting, but it follows then these men were all killed with a machine gun! Seems simple, but bullets leave marks! I've never heard of a machine gun strangling any one!"

"What? What?" gulped the captain. "Strangling? Doc, but they were mowed down—everybody says they were——"

"All right! All right!" snapped the medical examiner. "Then, *you* find the bullets! Look at the faces! They're turning black! This Royer Stannus and these others have been choked to death!"

Bumps McCarthy started moving slowly off the wharf. Something had

clicked in his brain. An odd item, that even during his cool filming of the murder scene had impressed itself upon his subconscious mind.

ROYER STANNUS and the others had died clawing for breath. And a machine-gun stream of bullets, directed from the bay across that little wharf, could hardly have missed all of the crowd fifty yards back of it.

Bumps saw the launch in which Stannus had come from his yacht still swung by its painter. The cameraman was trying to recall another angle that until now had eluded him.

There were seven dead men. Then why was his memory trying to fix upon another man, an eighth figure? That was it! There must have been another man in the launch—a man who was not lying with the others.

In the confusion, could one man have escaped death, have vanished? Bumps decided this might be possible. He could have reached that hydroplane. Perhaps that accounted for the speed boat's proximity to the wharf.

Bumps wasted no time recovering his camera. Before some one recalled his having been atop that automobile, he wanted to be well away from the scene. He found the camera intact, and slipped away, crossing the park to Biscayne Boulevard.

Despite the rain, hundreds were moving toward the water front.

"Royer Stannus!"

The name flashed from tongue to tongue. Though this senatorial candidate was of another State than Florida, he was considered a national figure. For Royer Stannus had been reputed to be a bulwark against wild-brained, get-rich-quick schemes which many were trying to foist upon the government at Washington.

Voices of the crowd were accusing. They were speaking several names. Not a few political figures but could have had a motive for removing the conservative Royer Stannus from the national horizon.

Well, he had been removed, thought Bumps McCarthy grimly. And he had the picture of a lifetime. But he was thinking now not of the new sensation for the screen, but of the evidence which might be in the camera under his arm.

Apparently, Royer Stannus had been assassinated by bullets. But there were no bullets. Right now, Bumps judged, the police would be turning to the theory of some poisonous gas.

Could some sort of destroying gas have been shot from that hydroplane?

Common sense disputed this, for it had affected only the seven at the end of the wharf. And now Bumps was convinced there had been another man, one forgotten by the crowd, by the two surviving policemen.

But the eye of the camera could hardly have missed him.

Bumps discarded the idea of taking a taxicab. When his movie camera was remembered, it would be as well to leave no trace. The police probably would be seeking the movie cameraman at one of the hotels.

They would hardly be looking for him on a rusty old tramp tanker anchored in the bay. Bumps followed the shore boulevard until he saw a blue, glowing light in the rain over the bay. He got into a small boat and rowed slowly toward the anchored ship.

CHAPTER II.

MURDER IN THE BAY.

BUMPS McCARTHY was rowing toward the blue glow in the black rain squall. The cameraman desired to develop the murder and explosion film as quickly as possible. He held the hope: that this might produce something well worth while being placed in the hands of the odd shipmaster, Captain John Fury.

Bumps at this time had no means of knowing that The Skipper had already been literally plunged into the mystery of the yacht explosion and the murders. The cameraman was congratulating himself on having an exclusive bit of evidence which might lead to action and adventure.

About the time Bumps McCarthy had mounted the automobile to film the landing of Royer Stannus, The Skipper was standing with Peter Doom on the bridge of the old *Whirlwind*. The Skipper's stalwart, stocky figure was hardly clothed for the company his tramp ship was keeping.

For Cap Fury had dropped the mud hook of the disreputable, rusty tanker on the middle holding ground of "Millionaires' Row." The three hundred feet of the battered vessel contrasted queerly with the two score of trim, graceful, white yachts.

The Skipper said, "I judge, Peter, we are about as welcome here as a pelican would be among a flock of swans. From the movements of our neighbors, we'll be having visitors soon who will have some protest to offer."

Cap Fury's Arctic blue eyes twinkled whimsically. He pushed a stray lock of rusty hair off his forehead, and shifted his feet. Tremendous sea boots, with wide, flaring tops, made him appear much shorter than he was. His master's uniform was far from being as spick-and-span as those of even lesser officers aboard neighboring yachts.

Peter Doom was as thin as a rail. He was tall, and full of bony angles. The skin over his square, long jaw was tight, giving his head the appearance of a skull. He dressed like an undertaker.

Peter flapped one hand from a black coat sleeve.

"A lot of easy money up this so-called Millionaires' Row, Cap," he stated, with solemn synicism. "And where there's easy money, a lot of it's bound to be crooked. There's a nice eyeful on that first yacht."

Peter Doom had once been an inspector with the New York police. His direct methods with criminals had been too strong for the stomachs of some of the politicians. So Peter had resigned and gone into the crook-hunting business for himself. By that he had come to be associated with The Skipper.

Now he was looking with solid black eyes through a pair of high-powered binoculars. These brought close a group under the after-deck awning of a white yacht some hundred yards away.

The Skipper took the glasses to observe what Peter had called an eyeful. A drinking party was in progress under the yacht awning. This was not unusual on any yacht in Millionaires' Row.

"I MEAN the two nice boys with the patent-leather hair and the champagne bottle between them, Cap," stated Peter.

Cap's binoculars were efficient. The dress of the party group on the yacht suggested that, if they were not especially cultured, at least all were what is known as "in the money." Cap picked out the pair to whom Peter referred.

They were sleek-looking fellows. Perhaps their evening clothes had too much sleekness. There were a few good-looking women under the awning. The prettiest of these was sitting with the two boys of the patent-leather hair.

"Make out anything special about them?" questioned Peter.

"Yes, Peter. They do not like our rusty yacht. In fact, from their conversation and their gestures, I believe they would like to have the *Whirlwind* removed from—wait a minute, Peter!"

Cap ceased speaking to study the faces on the yacht more closely. One of The Skipper's points of training was the reading of lips. Every word spoken by those whose mouths were visible was easily understood.

One man of the polished hair was

saying to the other, "If the boss is smart, he'll keep an eye on that old tramp ship. It's the *Whirlwind,* and we'd better make sure its hard-boiled captain doesn't have any reason to mix up in our business."

CAP FURY had not arrived in Biscayne Bay for the purpose of mixing in any one's business but that of the *Whirlwind's* owners. He had expected to meet "Grump" Rollin, chairman of the board, who was to fly down from New York.

Cap repeated to Peter Doom what had just been said. Peter let out a sepulchral growl.

"What are you bettin' Cap, that doesn't mean we're off to the races again? You wouldn't know those two nice boys, but unless I'm slipping, they're known to the numbers racket up North as Swank Paka and Dude Stavano. They're slippery."

CAP FURY

The Skipper merely nodded and grinned all the way across his broad, humorous mouth. He was making a close study of the girl seated with the pair. She was all golden-brown, and looked expensive. Her face was a delicate oval, but it was well-tanned. Now it was apparently glowing with some excitement.

Cap would know that face again, any time or anywhere. Likewise, he was fixing in mind others of the yacht party. But all the others seemed to be of the usual pleasure-seeking winter set. "Swank" Paka and "Dude" Stavano seemed to be only casual guests. Cap noted the name of the yacht was the *Petrel.*

Peter took the glasses. The golden-brown girl was talking with Paka and Stavano. Peter was not so adept at lip-reading as Cap.

But he said, "Cap, those rats wouldn't be up to any good down here. And right now they've got something on tap. They're keeping an eye on their watches."

The first burst of the sunset rain squall came just then. It was a flurry that sent the yacht party scattering from under the deck awning. And though Cap and Peter did not know this, it was at the moment Bumps McCarthy had been getting his shot of the Royer Stannus launch coming to the little wharf farther up the bay.

The Skipper and Peter heard the explosions that could have been a machine gun aboard the hydroplane that vanished. They had no means of knowing that seven men had died just then. But they had plenty to occupy their attention.

For on the break of the rain squall, an explosive blast shook Millionaires'

Row. Though the blowing up of the Stannus yacht was more than half a mile distant, at the other end of the anchored row, the old *Whirlwind* heeled to the blast and the resulting wave that came like a great tidal rush.

It was impossible at the moment, aboard the *Whirlwind*, to fix certainly the cause of the blast. But Cap's binoculars had swung instantly to the spot where the yacht *Flamingo* had been riven in the middle.

The Skipper had one detailed glimpse just before the slash of the black squall blotted out the disaster at the other end of the row. He snapped out an instant order.

"Spike, have out No. 3! Have Hurricane Dan stow the loose tackle against the blow! Peter, that explosion came from the outside of that yacht! There was a rowboat. I caught it just before it happened! We'll have a look!"

NOW the rusty hulk of the *Whirlwind* had the appearance of any other tramp ship. The steel plates were blackened, ill-kept. But at Cap's order, the plates at one side suddenly opened.

A stream-lined boat slid into the then tossing bay. Some mirrorlike quality of its metal alloy hull immediately took on the color of the storm about it. The craft was almost indistinguishable in the driving rain.

The man whom Cap had called Spike already was getting down a Jacob's ladder to the strange boat.

Spike wore a soiled and ragged uniform. Nevertheless, it was that of the chief officer of the *Whirlwind*. And the uniform seemed to harmonize with a face that had no single inch unscarred.

"Marlin Spike," Briggs, the *Whirlwind's* first mate, was the fourth member of the crook-hunting group, made up of The Skipper, Peter Doom and Bumps McCarthy. Small in stature, he was probably the toughest of the four. The scars on his face had been honorably or otherwise collected in many ports of the Seven Seas.

"Hurricane Dan" Belmont, the second mate, a huge, bare-chested, black, hairy figure, was carrying out the order to stow tackle as Cap, Peter and Spike slid away in the stream-lined boat.

So quickly had Cap's orders been carried out, the bay still was tossing from the effect of the yacht explosion as the mysterious mirrorlike craft shot into the rain. Cap stood in the forward cockpit without shelter from the storm. His master's cap had been swept from his rust-colored hair.

Through the black squall, figures could be dimly seen rushing about on some of the anchored yachts. Some wireless masts had been tipped. Débris had rained down on those yachts closest to the blasted *Flamingo*.

Due to the coming of the sunset storm, no small boats were then in evidence. Within a few minutes, the bay would be filled with police and other craft coming out from shore.

The stream-lined boat of Cap Fury operated on modern power all its own. There was no churning of a propeller at the stern. Instead, two bubbly white streaks shot out across the troubled bay and were lost in the storm.

An oil-burning engine of advanced design supplied power to two propellers in the heart of the stream-lined boat. These operated to create a vacuum in a pair of tubes extending from bow to stern. They shot the boat ahead like an arrow. Cap was first to have a close-up view of the wrecked *Flamingo*.

Cap slowed his craft and circled the spot slowly. Portions of the wreck floated near by. On one bit of wreckage was a man's severed arm. The last of the air from the yacht's stern bulkheads was hissing out. Except for the flotsam, the yacht *Flamingo* had gone down.

"By all the purple hells!" roared Peter Doom at Cap's shoulder. "That's

as complete a washout as I ever saw! And you say you think the explosion came from the outside? How could it?"

CAP made no reply. He had shut off the power of the stream-lined craft. From out of the rainy blackness came the roaring of a speed-boat motor. Cap flicked on a searchlight mounted in chrome steel.

The ray that shot into the squally murk was of intense blue. It was a fog-piercing light. A fast hydroplane leaped across it. Three men could be seen. But the blue ray gave them a ghostly appearance, and their faces were blurred.

"Police boat, maybe!" shouted Peter Doom. "Perhaps we ought to make some contact!"

"Not the police," judged Cap instantly, "or they would have picked us up. They seem concerned only in getting to some other place. They could hardly be connected with the explosion. I'm looking for the man who is."

Peter stared at Cap. There was no evidence of any person, living or dead, in the vicinity of the blasted yacht. As Peter had said, the washout had been complete. All of the crew must have been killed almost instantly.

"But if a man was close enough to have caused it, Cap, he would be with the other poor devils," said Peter.

"That storm light was tricky," said Cap. "But I thought I caught a row-boat, then a movement in the water near it, like some one swimming away just before the blast. We'll move out now before we have the whole shore fleet upon us."

Launches and boats of every description were heading out from shore. The siren of a police launch screamed for way. Cap deftly evaded the newcomers, keeping close along the line of yachts and heading toward the *Whirlwind*.

There was no evidence of a swimmer, or of any man having been picked up. Cap's boat was as silent as a ghost, and almost as invisible, as it came alongside the yacht *Petrel*, the nearest to the *Whirlwind*, on which Swank Paka and Dude Stavano had been seen.

The gangway light of the yacht was beaming brilliantly. Cap cautioned Peter to silence. A small motor boat carrying a single man apparently had come out from shore. A bulky man stepped from this to the gangway steps of the yacht.

"It's Jammer Cartnel!" hailed a voice from the deck above. "What's happened, Jammer?"

Cap saw a red-faced man climb into the light. He noted that Swank Paka and Dude Stavano were among those crowding around the newcomer. The man called Jammer Cartnel spoke in a heavy tone.

"It's hell!" he groaned. "Plain hell! Somebody gimme a drink!"

Perhaps he needed the drink, though he already looked more than a little drunk.

"WHAT'S happened, Jammer? That was the Royer Stannus yacht? Great guns! You don't mean he was on board —and he——"

The Skipper heard a woman's voice cry out. The golden-brown girl with the vivid face pushed close to Jammer Cartnel in the light. Her voice was clear, but unsteady.

"Jammer, please! What was it? Royer—oh, where is he? He was to be——"

Some one caught the girl's shoulders as she swayed. Another man held a drink to her trembling lips, but she pushed it away.

Jammer Cartnel shook his big head. His face was so red it appeared to have been boiled. He gulped a drink before he spoke.

"I would rather some one else had this job!" he said thickly. "But—well, Royer wasn't on the yacht, but there was

an accident when he landed! Please, Miss Rodens, sit down!"

Cartnel's further information that Royer Stannus had been killed was hardly required. Cap saw Swank Paka and Dude Stavano moving close to Cartnel. Their voices dropped. Cap's concealed boat was in no position for The Skipper to read the men's lips.

And if it had been, another unexpected matter suddenly claimed his attention. Intermittent lightning showed patches of the bay between the anchored yachts and the shore line of the tropical park along the Miami water front.

While he had been listening to the conversation on the yacht deck, Cap's keen eyes had been sweeping each small patch of sandy shoal toward the land. Now he touched Peter's arm and spoke softly to Spike Briggs.

"Get the boat back inside the *Whirlwind,* Spike. It's best not to have it seen now. I'll join you in a short time."

With no other word of explanation, The Skipper slipped quietly into the water. Any but his own companions would have imagined he must have suddenly become crazy—for Cap was wearing his huge sea boots with the flaring tops.

The rusty head of The Skipper immediately disappeared under the surface. But as Cap went under, one hand whipped a clothlike mask from one capacious boot top. This went over his face and enfolded his head. A tiny, flat oxygen chamber would supply him with air for several minutes. Cap swam rapidly away from the yacht *Petrel* under the surface.

Spike's obedience to command was instant. The first mate disregarded Peter Doom's rumbling oaths of protest. Cap had said to get the stream-lined boat under cover. Cap's slightest word was the law with Spike Briggs. He had no apprehension over The Skipper's ability to take care of himself.

As the stream-lined boat slid silently back to its housing in the *Whirlwind,* Cap was moving rapidly toward a shoal sand bar. For on that bar, the lightning had revealed a forlorn figure of a man.

This man apparently had been swimming. He appeared to be exhausted. Coat and shirt were almost torn from his body. He had pulled himself onto the shallow bar, but apparently lacked strength to attempt crossing the narrow channel still separating him from the park shore.

Cap reached the shoal water and emerged cautiously. He waited for a flare of lightning. He saw the man on the bar again, perhaps twenty yards away. Before he could move toward him, the roar of a boat's motor cut across the night. A roving searchlight leaped out and showed the figure of the man who had been swimming.

CHAPTER III.

THE WOMAN WOULD KILL.

THE SKIPPER grinned somewhat ruefully. He had hoped to rescue the spent swimmer. He was convinced he must be the same man he had glimpsed leaping from the rowboat just before the Stannus yacht had been blown up.

Though there was nothing as yet directly affecting his own interests or those of the *Whirlwind,* The Skipper desired very much to question this man. It seemed he was to be robbed of the chance by the sudden appearance of the speed boat.

Cap thought the exhausted man would be seen and picked up. In that event, The Skipper had no wish to explain his own presence. He watched the searchlight bore steadily upon the man in the shallow water of the bar.

That which happened came so quickly, Cap was unable to interfere. A shout came from the boat. The craft slued around. Cap saw it was a hydroplane and carried three men. He thought

perhaps it might be the same boat he had seen near the blasted yacht.

Whether it was that or another, the hydroplane abruptly picked up speed. Its searchlight played full upon the man in the water. The fellow reared up, shielding his eyes from the blinding searchlight as the boat came on.

Cap heard the men shouting, but the roar of their surface motor killed their words. The hydroplane was of shallow draught. At high speed, it barely skimmed the surface.

A terrible scream came from the man on the sand bar. The blunt bow of the speed boat caught him with terrific force. His arms flew up, and his body bent in the middle. Like some empty sack, his body was hurled off the bar into the channel.

An exultant yell came from the hydroplane. Being back of their light, the three men were indistinguishable to Cap.

Cap Fury could have stopped the hydroplane killers. But this was no time to act upon impulse. The Skipper's sleeve automatic was always ready for action. He was unsure, however, whether death should have been dealt out.

The hydroplane roared away in the darkness. The man who had been blotted from the sand bar had gone down immediately. Cap had no means of knowing whether death had been deserved. He considered it possible the man had been responsible for the blowing up of the Stannus yacht.

In that event, perhaps only a just vengeance had been exacted.

However, there was no time for debating the fine points of this situation. Cap went off the bar into the shore channel. It seemed impossible the other man could still be alive.

THE shattered body floated limply. Arms and legs hung down. A pinkish stain spread from the man's mouth. Undoubtedly, he had been mortally injured.

The Skipper caught the body, shouldered it. As he emerged, holding the unconscious man's face to the air, there was no sign of the hydroplane. Out in the bay, scores of boats were milling around. Cap could see that several launches were putting off from the yacht *Petrel.*

The Skipper speculated briefly on the queer relations of those who had been aboard the yacht; that Jammer Cartnel had called the gold-brown girl Miss Rodens. Plainly enough, the girl had been vitally concerned over the welfare of Royer Stannus.

Yet, to Cap's shrewd brain, there had been an air of difference about the others, as if they had expected something to happen. Just before the explosion, Peter Doom had said Swank Paka and Dude Stavano had apparently been waiting for something. They had been keeping tab on the time.

When Jammer Cartnel had arrived at the yacht after the explosion, the girl had appeared to be greatly shocked over news of an accident to Royer Stannus. But Paka and Stavano had betrayed only a desire to converse with Cartnel over the matter.

Cap Fury had known of Royer Stannus by reputation. The name of Jammer Cartnel had often been in the public prints as the political manager for the senatorial candidate. Cap recalled there had been some mention this man Stannus was on his way to the presidency.

These disconnected thoughts came to The Skipper as he got into the shallow water near the Miami shore. Rain continued to fall. The storm was illuminated in vague spots by scattered lights in a park.

Cap saw he had reached shore perhaps a mile below the business district of the city. The broken rockwork of a

Cap left the tree with a flying leap.

small park lay here. This was a short distance below the mouth of the Little Miami River.

Launches were hooting into and out of the river. Police investigation and crowd curiosity were having full swing, in spite of the blackness of the storm. Cap picked out launches from the yacht *Petrel* making into the river shelter.

The limp, broken body of the man in Cap's arms scarcely seemed to have a vital spark, as The Skipper got him ashore among some thick tropical shrubbery. From Cap's boot came a gleaming hypodermic syringe.

The Skipper pushed the needle directly into the great vein of the man's inanimate throat. For a full minute, the

body remained only pulseless flesh. Then there was a quivering of the torso. The man's lips fluttered and whispered.

THERE was no hope the man would live. His body was shattered and broken. The faint whispering was washed with scarlet on the trembling lips. Cap eased the man's head, spoke softly into his ear.

The man's eyes opened. He was young, hardly more than a boy. A downy beard on his youthful face had never been shaved. Though dazed, almost unseeing with the closeness of death, the eyes were steady, confiding, suffering.

Cap instantly decided this lad was not a criminal—not of the type that would have engaged in a crime of violence, blown up a yacht of his own volition.

"You'll have to speak as quickly as you can, son," advised The Skipper gently. "You were in a rowboat near a yacht. You got out of the boat and started to swim away. The yacht was blown up."

The boy's eyes bespoke the torture of broken bones prodding vital organs.

"Yes—yes——" Cap had to bend close to catch the whisper. "I didn't—didn't know—a man hired me—five dollars—take package to *Flamingo*—*Flamingo* yacht he said at six—must be six o'clock——"

"I see, son. And you were there at six exactly?"

"Yes—yes—something funny—package ticked like clock—tried to—tried to get it out of boat——"

The youth's eyes closed. His throat ceased to quiver. Blood gushed over The Skipper's hand. That was all the story the boy ever would tell. Cap Fury believed it implicitly.

As he had listened to the whispering, Cap's keen ears had detected the landing of a darkened launch somewhere on the park shore. Afterward, there was no sound but the slapping of the rain and the push of the ocean wind through the palm fronds.

The rubbing of the fronds might have been footsteps. They sounded remarkably like men moving stealthily. The dead youth was in Cap's arms.

The Skipper's success in his personal war on crime had been founded on his ability to think fast, to formulate definite plans when he had only the barest thread of a lead in his hands. This dead boy, hired for five dollars to deliver a deadly infernal machine to the Royer Stannus yacht, might be the clue that could break the plot of the yacht explosion wide open.

No doubt it was involved with whatever accident had happened to Royer Stannus. The Skipper knew little of that as yet. He did not know that, at this moment, Bumps McCarthy was laboriously rowing against the headwind of the storm in order to reach the *Whirlwind*.

Cap acted on what he knew. The men in that hydroplane had meant to kill this boy, seal his lips. They would believe they had accomplished the murder. But if they were led to think the youth had survived, might still talk, things would begin to happen.

THE SKIPPER'S instant action seemed brutal, ruthless. That was another of the contributing reasons for his becoming a terror to criminals. Cap

never hesitated to do the thing which at the moment might lead to results.

Keeping a watchful eye on the nearest spot of light in the small park The Skipper bore the dead boy back to the rocky shore. There he performed a crude, temporary burial. Moving a few of the heavier rocks, he thrust the broken corpse under the water. He rolled the rocks back into place.

Cap returned to the small park with a catlike tread. He was sure he was being stalked for some reason. Perhaps some of those on the yacht with Jammer Cartnel had glimpsed the stream-lined boat. Or the three men in the hydroplane might have feared their brutal killing had not been a success.

There was only the one circle of light in the rain of the park. This was rimmed by the halo of the rain. Palm trees drooped near by. A solitary pine swayed in the darkness. *Slap, slap, slap* came the soft steps of a man moving around the spot of radiance.

The Skipper of the *Whirlwind* was himself a vague shadow. His next movement was a silent leap. This was like the lithe action of a jungle cat. It carried him soundlessly into the first branches of the pine tree. Some twenty feet above the ground, The Skipper became a part of the foliage.

Slap, slap, slap came the feet below. They moved slowly as they approached the light. A man clad in evening clothes emerged into the luminance. Cap saw enough of the face and sleek hair under the light to identify the man as either Swank Paka or Dude Stavano.

The Skipper had been unable from Peter's information to differ between the two.

But it was apparent the man in evening clothes had not come into the rainy tropical park on a peaceful errand. There was the blue glint of steel from a hand held tightly at the man's side. He circled in the light, peering into the shrubbery.

The Skipper judged there could be but one reason for the fellow being here. He must have been led to believe the youth who had escaped from the rowboat and been run down by the hydroplane had still been able to crawl ashore.

THE fellow pushed the shrubbery aside, his automatic held in readiness. Here was the possibility of the information that Cap had planned a trap to seek. If this fellow could be captured and made to talk, it would be sufficient.

Cap Fury listened intently. Though he was convinced others had come ashore in the launch which had landed not far away, it was possible they were searching along the shore. Cap had his own methods of taking a prisoner; also of making a captive talk. The latter was most unpleasant, but effective.

The man in the evening clothes was now almost directly below him. Cap left the tree with a flying leap. The scratching of his feet snapped the man's head up. His automatic whipped into line.

But as the pistol exploded, Cap's stocky body crashed upon the sleek head. The man's shoulders cracked like dry sticks under the sudden impact. His automatic flew from his hand. When he went down, his white face drove into the soggy ground.

Cap whirled over and alighted with

the agility of a cat. He caught the body from the ground. The man was still breathing, but he would not be able to talk for some time. Cap intended his first speech should be aboard the *Whirlwind.*

In this intention, The Skipper was abruptly balked. The husky voice of a woman cried out. Her figure appeared at the edge of the light circle. Cap had got the man in evening clothes to the edge of darkness. He saw an oval face, golden-brown with tan, luminous eyes shining in the rain.

Cap had no time to see more. The girl cried out again.

Her words were amazing, wholly unexpected.

"I said I would kill you if——"

The matter of the "if" went unheard, for the girl started shooting with a pistol that came from the bosom of her low-cut evening gown. Bullets mushed into a near-by palm tree. But not all of them. It was good shooting for a woman, or she was accidentally lucky.

A slug whisked past Cap's ear. Another slug found a mark, perhaps the target the girl intended. The throat of the man Cap still held opened in a gaping, bloody streak. A knife slashing across it could not have been more effective. Not all of the direct methods employed on the *Whirlwind* would ever make this man talk.

The Skipper dropped the sagging body. Now he could hear the thumping of other feet. Several men were running. Cap could have reached the girl. He made a split-second decision.

He was convinced the young woman with the ready pistol could not have seen enough of him in the darkness to have identified him later. As she stood, in the light, she could only have been shooting at the shadows of himself and the man she had killed.

Attempting to take the girl now, with others pounding toward the spot, could result only in a clash, an open fight against numbers. Whatever its outcome, this offered slight opportunity to get at the truth of the night's several weird happenings.

Later, Cap could seek the young woman. And he saw now that the girl apparently had no intention of remaining until the approaching men arrived, for she whipped around and glided into the shrubbery. She was fleeing toward the Bayshore Boulevard which lay about two hundred yards back of the park.

CAP smiled grimly, and faded into the shrubbery back of the dead man. Three men rushed into the circle of light. Cap saw they were not of those he had seen on the yacht. The three could have been those aboard the murder hydroplane.

The Skipper lingered for a moment, close by. One of the men stumbled over the body of the fellow in evening clothes.

An oath prefaced, "And he must have got Swank! By hell! I thought we'd busted him wide open!"

"That damned kid!" growled another man. "Say! He wasn't packin' no rod! What become of the dame?"

"Her?" snapped the third man. "Hell! She's Stannus's sweetie, an' she's with us all the way! She said she was goin' to the hotel!"

The Skipper moved silently toward the shore. So the man who had been killed was Swank Paka, one of the sleek pair on the yacht. The three men who had found him were uncertain how he had died.

But clearly, they believed the girl with the ready gun could not have done the shooting. One had said she was the sweetie of Royer Stannus. That checked with her frightened anxiety when Cartnel had spoken of an accident.

Cap Fury thought that perhaps the girl did not know she had killed Swank Paka. Certainly, she was unaware of

Cap's own identity. She could not have seen him in the darkness.

Then who did the young woman believe she was making the target of her effective pistol?

The whole affair in the park became decidedly mysterious. Cap could only judge that possibly the girl had been frightened into a panic, and fired at shadows without any definite object of killing any one. Many hysterical women and a few nervous men will do things like that when they are excited.

But as Cap silently slipped into the bay over the broken rocks, he had almost discarded that last theory.

"That young lady is a very cool number," he murmured. "She was following Swank Paka. There's no doubt of that. And yet on the yacht, a little more than an hour ago, she and that sweet pair were thicker than thieves."

The Skipper was making his way over the shoals in the direction of the blue foglike radiance that marked the position of the old tanker *Whirlwind* in the storm. When he reached the deeper channel, he swam silently.

He soon reached the *Whirlwind*.

Cap went up the ship's side by the Jacob's ladder. Peter Doom and Spike Briggs greeted him.

"There's been murder, Cap. Royer Stannus and six others," announced Peter. "And Bumps McCarthy is developing a film of it."

CHAPTER IV.

MURDER ON THE FILM.

"THE film of the murders?" said Cap Fury. "Bumps usually manages to be on the spot."

"He's developing it now," said Peter Doom. "But he's screwy as ever. Comes aboard jabbering some crazy story about Stannus and six other men being chopped down by a machine gun, and then says none of the bullets hit them. Sometimes, I think we should have Bumps examined."

"Without bullets?" said The Skipper musingly. Instantly, he made a decision.

"Peter, in five minutes we are calling on our good neighbors of the yacht *Petrel*. I have reason to appear as if it were only a friendly call."

The Skipper's transformation from a tramp-ship master into an impeccable figure who might himself have owned a million-dollar yacht was accomplished

in two minutes. In the third minute, The Skipper, with Peter Doom, was being rowed in a small boat toward the near-by yacht *Petrel.*

Captain John Fury, college man, gentleman scientist, a handsome figure with bland blue eyes, preceded Peter Doom up the gangway steps of the *Petrel.* None of the score of persons under the flapping awning of the yacht could have guessed this man in correct evening clothes and with his innocent air could have been ashore in the stormy rain only a few minutes before.

Most certainly, none would have believed he had been one of the central figures of the murder of Swank Paka, of which those on the yacht were not yet informed. Nor could they have imagined The Skipper, with his quiet, sympathetic voice, had within the past half hour been engaged in prowling about the bottom of the bay and extracting some truth from a boy who had been hired to die in a yacht explosion.

Jammer Cartnel was still aboard the yacht. The red-faced man was now more than a little drunk. He had been sitting at a table talking with some other men. Though he was of the politician type, with a face worn into the grooves of a fixed smile, Jammer Cartnel was now apparently a grief-stricken man.

" 'Preciate your comin' to—to sympathize—er—Captain Fury," he mumbled. "Y' heard it—on the radio, eh? The best friend a man ever had—the one biggest hope of the United States of America—yeshir—that was Royer—my friend, Royer Stannus. An' they got 'im—they said they'd get 'im—an' they said——"

NO doubt, once launched, the political-minded Jammer Cartnel would have enlarged endlessly upon the merits of his friend, Royer Stannus. It was easy to judge that Stannus had been the political manager's bread and butter, or perhaps he wanted it to appear that way.

Cap Fury introduced Peter Doom. He said they had heard of the strange murders on the wharf. The Skipper's blandly innocent eyes, his quiet voice, gave no indication of any extraordinary interest of a personal nature. He said he had dropped over merely to inquire if any one on the yacht had a theory as to the explosion destroying the *Flamingo.*

"Terr-bul! Terr-bul!" groaned Jammer Cartnel, helping himself to another drink. "Almost got me—it did—was goin' 'board the *Flamingo*—come over for Miss Rodens—Royer's fiancée, y' know—an' it saved m' life——"

Jammer Cartnel was proceeding to talk volubly. He was naming names of some he said were the enemies of Royer Stannus. According to Jammer, he must have just missed being murdered twice. For he had intended to accompany Royer Stannus to the city, he said, and had changed his mind at the last minute. Then he had learned of the killings on the wharf.

Jammer Cartnel seemed to be a very lucky individual indeed.

In another few minutes, Cap and Peter Doom had learned that the yacht *Petrel* was owned by a friend of Cartnel's. The yacht had been chartered in order that Cartnel might entertain those who might be friends of Royer Stannus, without disturbing the great man aboard his own yacht, the *Flamingo.*

The Skipper caught a gleam in Peter Doom's solid black eyes. Yes, it said, Jammer Cartnel could be entertaining persons like Swank Paka and Dude Stavano on another yacht. In the little game of politics, such fellows could be useful; yet it would have been ill advised for them to have been seen on the Royer Stannus yacht.

The captain of the yacht *Petrel* was a hard-faced man of middle age. His eyes were gray and icy. Keeping to his position, the yacht captain had remained aloof from the conversation. Others of

the apparent guests aboard the yacht had kept silent, letting Jammer Cartnel do the talking.

Yet The Skipper of the *Whirlwind* did not miss the searching scrutiny bent upon him by the yacht captain. There was strong disapproval in the man's steady gaze. But that might have been for the drunken Cartnel and the character of his guests.

"We'll be pulling back," said Cap Fury quietly. "I came only to see if any of us might give assistance in solving the yacht explosion. That's bad stuff, and I wouldn't want my own ship endangered."

The yacht captain interrupted, speaking for the first time.

"I think you'll do well to get that filthy old tanker out of the yacht grounds," he said coldly. "There has been complaint from owners, and I wouldn't worry much about your old tramp being in danger. Better a few thousand insurance than keeping that old hunk of rust afloat."

"Cap'n! Cap'n!" interposed Jammer Cartnel drunkenly. "You forget your place, shir! Cap'n Fury my guest!"

Peter Doom started a throaty oath, but Cap touched his arm. The Skipper wore a smile across his good-humored mouth.

"I'M inclined to agree with your captain, Mr. Cartnel," he stated calmly. "The *Whirlwind* doesn't rank with the company she's keeping in this row of yachts. Well, we'll be going along."

The Skipper had accomplished the purpose for which he had come. The report of the Swank Paka killing would be coming along any minute. None would have believed Cap Fury had recently been ashore. But there was suspicion, dislike of another kind expressed in the faces of the several men on the *Petrel*.

Cap saw that Jammer Cartnel welcomed his intention to depart. Just then, a radio loud-speaker gave forth a news bulletin from the near-by cabin.

"Another murder has been added to the grim tragedy of to-night. A man known as Swank Paka has been found shot to death in Bayfront Park."

Jammer Cartnel lurched to his feet. Another man put a hand on his arm. But Cartnel swore heavily.

What might have been said was abruptly terminated by the thunderous beat of a speed-boat motor. Cap Fury and Peter Doom were then standing at the top of the gangway steps, in the light of the deck. A hydroplane shot out of the darkness.

Apparently, it was headed directly for the *Petrel*. The Skipper stood motionless. There were three men in the hydroplane. But the hydroplane did not reach the *Petrel* gangway. Doubtless the man at the wheel saw Cap and Peter Doom. He swung the rudder, and the hydroplane sheered off.

Behind Cap and Peter, the voices of Cartnel and the others growled in low tones. Cap apparently paid no attention to this. He started down the gangway steps. He did not have to be informed the men in the hydroplane had intended landing at the *Petrel*, but had changed their minds when they had seen the visitors.

As Cap's small boat started back to the *Whirlwind*, one of the old tanker launches slid out of the darkness. The scarred face of Spike Briggs loomed over the wheel. Behind Spike was Bumps McCarthy. The round-faced cameraman was jumping up and down and waving his hands.

"I suppose that half-witted nut has got something," growled Peter Doom. "Cap, all this business to-night can be broken right there on the *Petrel*. Cartnel, that captain, all of the so-called guests are in on something. I'm for bringing the *Whirlwind* crew over and rounding up that mob while the thing's hot."

The Skipper was watching Spike and Bumps. He signaled to Spike to turn about and return to the Whirlwind.

Then he said quietly, "Peter, all we know thus far hasn't scratched the surface of this thing. Without Royer Stannus, this Jammer Cartnel is just another drunk political hanger-on out of a job. I'm convinced this is only the beginning of something bigger than anything we have yet encountered."

"Only the beginning?" rumbled Peter Doom. "By my sacred aunt! A yacht blown up, and everybody killed! Eight men murdered, and you say it's only the beginning?"

"Nine men murdered, Peter," corrected The Skipper. "And of all of them, the killing of Royer Stannus may be all that is of importance. We'll see what Bumps has run onto."

That which Bumps McCarthy had to offer forced Peter Doom to admit this might only be the beginning.

BUMPS produced his developed film in the projection room of the old *Whirlwind*. Had the grouchy, ill-natured captain of the yacht *Petrel* been in the cabin of Captain Fury at this time, he might have changed his mind about what he had called an old hunk of rust.

For the deceptively disreputable hull of the *Whirlwind* housed perhaps the world's rarest cabin. Extending nearly the full length of the old tanker, this space contained modern fittings, costly curios, treasures in furnishings gathered from many ports, a complete deep-sea laboratory, radio communications advanced beyond even this modern time, and a score of other appurtenances.

The contents of The Skipper's cabin alone were more valuable than half of all the yachts on Millionaires' Row. It included diving apparatus whereby Captain Fury had descended to greater depths in the oceans than any other living man.

Just now, however, The Skipper's interest centered on the film the Super-World News Reel cameraman had developed. It flashed on the small screen. The coördinated sound meant little, for this reproduced mostly the jabbering and yells of the crowd that had come down to Biscayne Bay to greet Royer Stannus.

Bumps ran the film off to the moment when the pompous figure of Royer Stannus was seen appearing over the edge of the small wharf. Directly behind the great man appeared the gray face of his secretary. Then there were the three sailors who had come in the launch from the *Flamingo*. On the wharf were the two policemen, who stood by as Royer Stannus landed.

"Now watch!" exclaimed Bumps. "Keep your eye on the edge of the wharf, Cap! We're coming to it! We're right to the apparent shooting!"

The film blurred somewhat by the burst of the rain that had come at that

instant. But a speeding hydroplane was seen like a gliding shadow. It seemed to be heading for the wharf, almost as if it might crash the light structure. The two policemen saw this, for one raised his hand and shouted a warning.

Into the sound of the copper's voice burst crackling explosions. They came from the hydroplane, which had suddenly slowed its reckless drive toward the wharf. The *Whirlwind* Skipper closed his eyes for a second. Yes, the sound could have been machine-gun explosions.

But then Cap saw a cloud of blue smoke whirling from the stern of the hydroplane. He noted that none of this smoke reached the small wharf. The rain squall increased on the screen. The blue smoke was whisked to one side by the wind.

But the hydroplane seemed to pause, to hesitate. Three men, their faces averted, showed in the boat. Cap could see their faces were covered, as if by small masks.

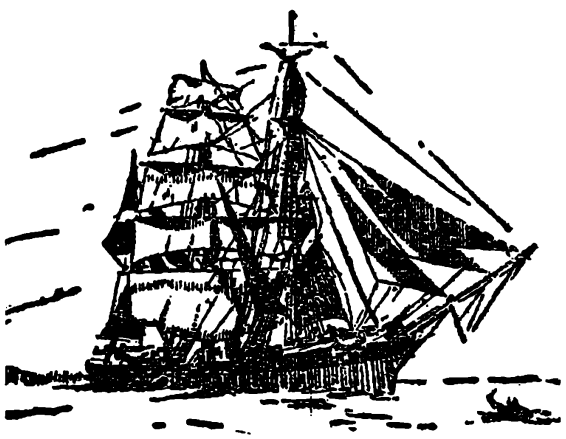
And then, Royer Stannus and the other men were clawing blindly at the air about them. One of the policemen grabbed at his throat, his mouth gaped open and he fell down. All of the seven collapsed.

Cap marked that not a sound issued from any throat. Yet the racket and the men falling was sufficient to create the impression that all of the men had been shot.

"NOW!" snapped Bumps. "The hydroplane is going away, and there you are!"

"By all the blue-green hells!" rumbled Peter Doom.

The Skipper said nothing. His eyes were glued to the ponderous head of a man who had just showed over the edge of the wharf. The head was covered by a tightly drawn cap. The man was holding what appeared to be his handkerchief to his face.



That big head bobbed up, and it went down. It was almost as if it had vanished into the water. Yet it was apparent that the man must have been aboard the Royer Stannus launch. No doubt he had been in hiding in some compartment of the spacious launch.

It was at this instant, the exact second of murder and the disappearance of the eighth man at the litle wharf, that the faithful eye of Bumps McCarthy's Old Sure-shot picked up the Royer Stannus yacht. Perhaps it was a lightning flare that gave the light.

There on the screen was confirmed what Cap Fury had witnessed. A man showed in a rowboat. At the instant of the take, he was standing up, diving overboard. There was another flare of lightning. The empty rowboat and the yacht became one blinding blaze in the background of the movie film.

That dazzling glare of the yacht explosion, coincident with the full burst of the black rain squall served to erase the little wharf and the seven dead men from the picture. What might have happened to that eighth man could never be ascertained from the film.

Yet in the minds of all was that clear impression. An eighth head was there. The man was holding a handkerchief over his face. If he made it to the hydroplane, the movement was lost.

Or could he have fallen into the water and been drowned?

The Skipper did not think so.

"You've never taken a better picture, Bumps," he approved. "It would be a news sensation. You would be made as a cameraman. However"—and Cap grinned—"just for the present, it would be best for us to keep this to ourselves."

"Sweet hell! I knew it!" groaned Bumps. "But what do you think killed those seven men, Cap? Poison gas?"

"It could be theoretically," stated Cap. "But it wasn't. Royer Stannus and the others died on the first burst of that squall. No gas could have come from that hydroplane, for the wind was whipping the smoke of those explosions in another direction."

"But that extra man, Cap?" suggested Peter Doom.

"We don't often work with the police, but this time use your influence to make direct and quick contact."

CHAPTER V.

THE HOSPITAL TRAP.

BEFORE noon the following day, Peter Doom's contact with the police had developed at least one bit of amazing information. This confirmed the uncanny judgment of The Skipper.

Royer Stannus had not been murdered by poison gas. Nor had any of the six other men who had died on the Biscayne Bay wharf.

"I can't make it out, Cap," reported Peter Doom. "This medical examiner is throwing fits himself. First, they seemed to have been chopped with a machine gun; and then all seven men choked to death."

The medical examiner had called in other physicians. The lungs of Royer Stannus, of the others, had collapsed. They bore every evidence of the seven men having been asphyxiated.

The Skipper's mind jumped to that eighth man with the handkerchief held over his face—the man who must have been hidden on the launch—and to the apparent masks on the men in the hydroplane as shown by the movie film.

"Have the police picked up any suspects?" he questioned Peter.

"The usual hundred or so riffraff sleeping in the parks. They have even questioned Jammer Cartnel and Dude Stavano. Some one had tipped them off to this girl. She's Tarna Rodens, and it is reported she was to have married Stannus. Well, she was at a hotel last night, but this morning she had disappeared. Checked out and left no forwarding address."

The Skipper shook his head, and smiled grimly.

"You will recall the girl was sitting with Paka and Stavano over on the *Petrel* when the murders took place, Peter. And Cartnel arrived shortly after the explosion. Where had he been?"

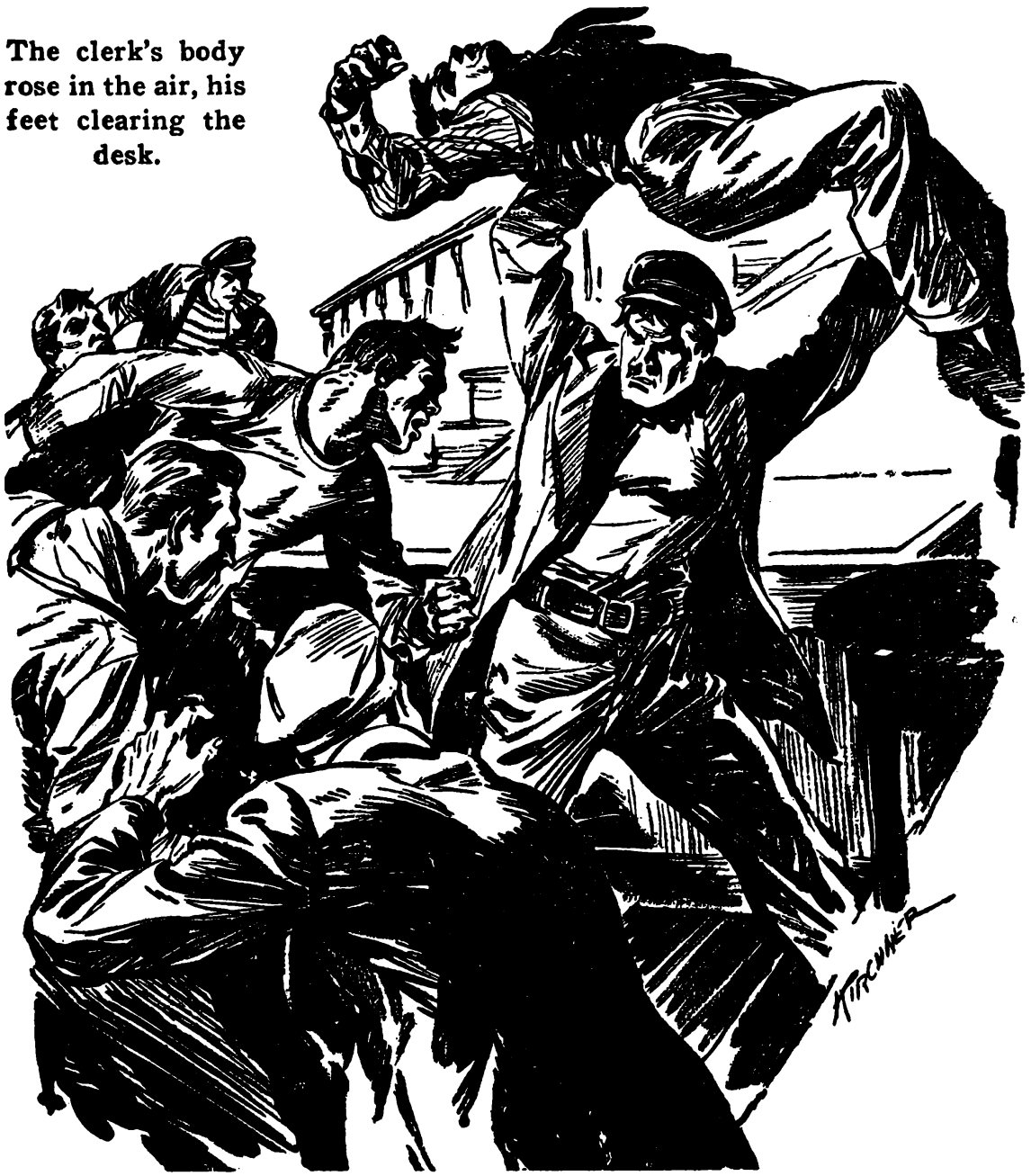
"Cartnel's alibi is ironclad," stated Peter. "In fact, he was talking with two detectives in Bayfront Park at the moment the murders took place and the yacht was blown up."

If the Skipper had formed any idea that Jammer Cartnel might have been the eighth man whose face was concealed on the wharf, the alibi changed it. He was a man with a big head. That was all the film had showed.

"The body of Royer Stannus is to be cremated at once," said Peter. "Cartnel produced a request in the man's own writing and signed by him. It almost seemed as if Stannus expected to be bumped off suddenly. He was a bachelor, and had only some distant relatives."

The Skipper walked the length of the *Whirlwind* cabin. He called through the tube to the upper deck.

"All set, Spike? We are leaving in a few minutes. Remember, you're working with the police this time, so don't fly loose at the wrong moment. Your job will be to lie low and get on the trail of any one who leaves that hospital suddenly."



The clerk's body rose in the air, his feet clearing the desk.

Spike Briggs expressed an inelegant opinion of all police and the job to which he had been assigned. Cap returned to the table beside Peter, and said, "The story is on the street, and everything else is fixed then?"

PETER grinned solemnly and spread a newspaper. There was a headlined item.

An unidentified man, believed to have been seriously injured by the mysterious explosion of the Royer Stannus yacht *Flamingo,* was picked up by police on the bay front early this morning. The man was found to be suffering from grave injuries and was unconscious. His clothes were in tatters. He revived only enough to mutter deliriously, "They hired me to do it——" It is reported the *Flamingo* explosion originated from the outside. The man found is young, about twenty. He is believed to have been in a rowboat going toward the destroyed yacht. He is being closely guarded in the Biscayne Boulevard emergency hospital. The police hope he will be able to shed some light on the explosion mystery

when he recovers full consciousness. He is given an even chance to live.

Cap Fury folded the newspaper.

"Now that should turn up something, Peter. You will stand by with Spike. Bumps had best stay out of this. I don't want him spotted. You said the police are looking for a red-headed cameraman who was at the wharf?"

Peter Doom nodded gloomily. While he had followed The Skipper's instructions and lined up the police trap for the hospital, he had not been able to follow much of Cap's quick reasoning. He had been amazed to learn that Cap had planned all of this while he had still been in the bay the night before.

That had been one of the reasons for The Skipper's visit to Jammer Cartnel on the *Petrel*. It had done away with any suspicion that he might have known what was going on ashore. Now Cap handed Peter Doom another surprise.

"It isn't the murder of Royer Stannus that is important," he stated. "Nor even the blowing up of his yacht. Peter, we are about to come to grips with something bigger than the death of a presidential possibility. And it isn't the murderer we're after so much as the method he employed. That's the threat we have to put our hands on."

Peter Doom was still shaking his head when Cap Fury left the *Whirlwind*. Not only was Peter nonplused by The Skipper's reasoning, but he had failed to persuade Cap to change his idea for the hospital trap. Peter wanted to take the risk himself.

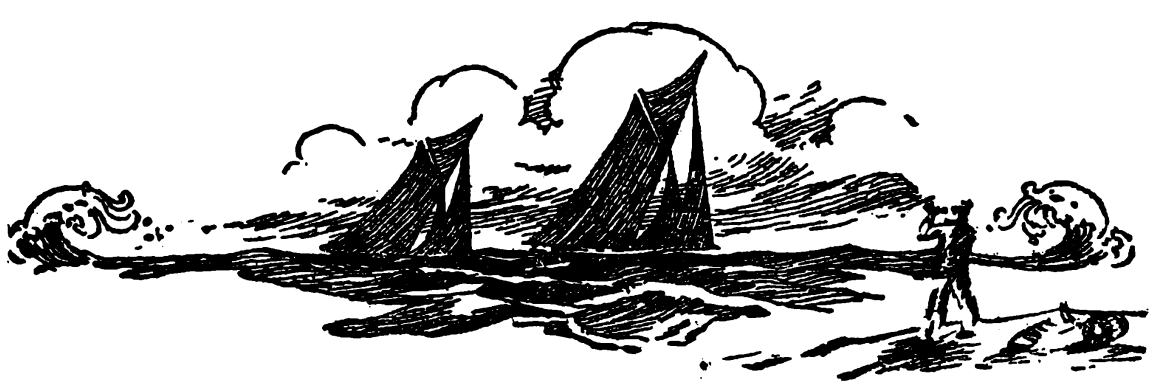
For The Skipper himself was soon to be the bandaged patient in the Biscayne Boulevard hospital, a patient deliberately planted for the expected visit of a murderer or murderers.

Cap was convinced the plotters behind the choking death on the wharf could not afford to let one man live and talk. The man in the rowboat! The boy they had no means of knowing was only a broken corpse still concealed under the rocks of one of Miami's bayfront parks.

LESS than an hour after his conversation with Peter Doom, Captain Fury was a stiffly bandaged figure lying on a small iron bed. Disguise other than the bandages about his face and head was unnecessary, for only one of Cap's Arctic-blue eyes was exposed.

The little iron bed was set in the corner of the Biscayne Boulevard emergency hospital. Cap's position was such, though he was apparently unconscious, that one sharp eye had a full view of all movement, of all persons in the big room.

A uniformed policeman occupied a chair close to the bed on which Cap was lying. The copper was plainly uneasy. He sat with his back to the wall. If he hadn't feared it would show he was yellow, he would have had his revolver in his hand. As it was, the cop-



per kept the leather holster unbuttoned and hoped for the best.

Less than half a dozen visitors had been permitted in the big room. Two nurses and a couple of internes moved furtively about. They had been informed of what might happen. They eyed with suspicious fear all who entered.

The Skipper lay rigid for two weary hours. Spike Briggs and Peter Doom were planted at vantage points outside. Peter was at the wheel of a car marked for hire. The copper on guard was replaced by another, and he showed plainly enough he was glad that trick was over.

Several minor accident cases had been brought in. Inaction irked The Skipper. The afternoon was hot, and the bandages were stifling. He pondered every point. Had the hospital trap been too obvious? Or might the body under the rocks have been discovered?

At that point in his thinking, there came a slight interruption. Two men were carried in on stretchers. Both appeared to be unconscious. Their faces were bloody and bruised. Cap heard an ambulance man say they had mixed alcohol with gasoline and wound up with a telephone pole on top of their car.

A fussy, little doctor started an examination. Cap heard him announce the men did not seem to be injured seriously, but both were suffering from concussion. At this instant, Cap's one blue eye was fixed across the room upon the face of one of the injured crash victims. He saw one eye open, close, and open again.

The Skipper's body stiffened against his bandages. They had been fixed loosely. One of his wrapped hands was fastened on the butt of an automatic. The doctor may have judged the auto victim's to be unconscious, but the eye Cap had seen was black and piercing.

And that eye had been directed at the policeman seated at the head of Cap's bed. The Skipper spoke softly through his bandages to the copper.

"On your toes, mister. We're coming to breakers. Those two auto cases are about as unconscious as I am."

The policeman was making a quick movement. His hand slapped to his gun holster.

"Easy takes it," warned Cap quietly. "Remember, it's their first move. I've got both of them nicely covered."

"Yeah?" growled the copper. "Tied up like that, you couldn't hit a horse."

"You'd be surprised," said Cap softly.

THE copper shifted his position to where he could watch the auto-accident cases. Others of the police were planted about the hospital. The doctor still fussed around the crash patients.

Cap spoke softly again. "Remember, mister, whatever happens, at least one man must be permitted to make a getaway. Any who might be seeking to kill me would be no more than hired men, like that young fellow they sent out to the yacht."

The police had been given their instructions by the commissioner of public safety. Peter Doom had that much influence. For the moment, it was only The Skipper of the *Whirlwind* who was in deadly danger.

If he had not seen that one open eye observing him, he would still have been uninformed from which direction the lightning might strike. He wondered if the accident cases had been searched. Likely not, for the doctor was only now giving an order for them to be undressed.

Then the double doors in front opened again. An interne came in, announcing:

"A young lady to see about the man from the bay!"

Cap's blue eye glinted toward the doorway. A tall, willowy young woman was entering. Her face was partly concealed by a drooping sun hat. But she

was the golden-brown girl, Tarna Rodens. Shining brown hair showed under the hat. Her eyes were wide and soft and brown. Her oval face had a golden tan.

This was the first close view Cap Fury had been given.

The interne had his instructions. He halted Tarna Rodens and took her satchel purse. A nurse stepped forward and ran her hands expertly over the girl's clothing.

Apparently, the young woman was unarmed; her hands were empty. The nurse smiled, and nodded. Cap watched Tarna Rodens walk to his bed. The wide, brown eyes were staring at his bandaged form.

The Skipper marveled at the placid calmness of Tarna Rodens. It was incomprehensible that this girl had killed a man, had struck with the quickness of tigerish impulse.

Tarna Rodens spoke to the nurse beside her. And her voice was as calm as her face, a little husky.

"Has this man recovered consciousness? If he hasn't, might I be permitted to see his face? I may know him. But if I do not, I would like very much to talk with him later."

Cap lay rigid, waiting for what more Tarna Rodens might say. But he did not even catch the nurse's reply. The arrival of the girl had taken his attention, diverted the guarding policeman from the two auto-accident cases.

THERE was a swift flurry of sound, the crash of an iron bed that creaked into the wall as one of the supposedly unconscious men hit the floor with his feet. From the man's trousers leg whipped a pistol.

This was aimed point-blank at Cap Fury when it spouted flame. The other accident case also was on his feet. He was making a jump for an open door at the side of the emergency ward. This led to a side gallery below which was an alleyway.

The Skipper performed a remarkable feat. He was lying stiffly bandaged in the iron bed when the first pistol exploded. The bullet might have hit him, but he rolled swiftly to the floor, striking on his hands and knees and doubling his body.

Beside the bed, the policeman shouted and dragged out his revolver. The copper staggered, and then fell forward on the bed where Cap had been lying. Bullets pinged and whined from the floor and the hard wall.

A voice shouted, "Look out for the damn girl!"

The Skipper had already looked out for Tarna Rodens. His bandaged body struck her ankles. His steel-wire arms wrapped about her knees and pulled her down on top of him.

"Lie still!" Cap commanded. "Don't move until this is over!"

He flashed to his feet, shedding the loose bandages. The two accident cases had not been alone. Two windows on the gallery and the door filled with men. These wore handkerchief masks. Outside, half a dozen policemen had been taken by surprise. There had been several shots, but now the coppers were backed up under the noses of guns.

Cap's automatic snapped once. The nearest auto accident case, the one who had shot the police guard, twisted on his heels and sat down in a queer position. Over his right eye appeared a round, blue hole.

But there were three men in the doorway now. One had a pistol leveled at Cap's still partly bandaged body.

Beside Cap, from the floor, a small gun spat viciously. It was in the slender hand of Tarna Rodens. Cap saw that one of the girl's silk stockings had been torn from a rounded leg. The pistol had been concealed there under her skirt.

The man with the pistol, in the door-

way, stumbled backward and fell. Then Cap heard two voices shout profanely.

"Damn my eyes, Peter!" came from Spike Briggs.

From the gallery came a booming crash of shots. None but the huge Police Positives of Peter Doom ever made such a thunderous racket. The doorway and the window suddenly cleared of

The helpless Tarna Rodens was being carried out into the lagoon.

men. In the window appeared the long, gloomy face of the ex-inspector of police.

PETER DOOM held a big revolver in each hand. He had jumped from the driver's seat of the car marked for hire to join Spike Briggs. Cap shook off all his bandages, except those which still concealed all but one blue eye in his face.

The Skipper whirled. His purpose was to seize Tarna Rodens. But the girl had sprung toward the front double doors. Her small pistol menaced the internes and nurses, though she did not shoot again. There had been police hidden near the front door. They had rushed to the scene of shooting at the side gallery.

Cap moved fast, but the girl was faster. Her silken ankles flashed.

"Back to your car, Peter!" grated The Skipper, jumping for the front doors.

A trailing length of bandage tripped him, and he delayed to pull it loose. When he got through the doors, the girl was across the wide sidewalk of Biscayne Bouelvard. The usual afternoon tourist crowd was surging into the shelter of doorways. Bullets still spatted from the alleyway.

"By all the purple hells! Come outta that car!"

This was the roaring voice of Peter Doom. Obeying Cap's command, Peter had rushed toward his planted car. He had left the engine running for a quick get-away. He had expected to get upon the trail of some man or men who might have been in the hospital.

Now Cap saw the slender figure of the golden-brown girl already in the seat of the car. She had dropped her pistol. Peter Doom was pointing a revolver at her.

"Don't move or I'll let you have it!" bellowed the enraged Peter.

Cap knew Peter would do as he said. The hard-boiled ex-inspector made no distinction of sex among crooks. Cap dived headlong. He was just in time to strike Peter's lanky legs with his bulky shoulders. The ex-inspector's revolver boomed.

But Tarna Rodens had swung the car into gear and it was jumping away into the flowing traffic. Cap rolled over, hearing Peter's wild oaths of anger at having missed.

The girl could drive. She went through a traffic light.

CHAPTER VI.

DEAD MEN NEVER TALK.

THE fearfully scarred face of Spike Briggs emerged from the alleyway beside the emergency hospital. A green coupé with one man at the wheel was parked a few yards from the alley on Biscayne Boulevard.

More shots snapped from the vicinity of the side gallery, Peter Doom had shoved a taxi driver from his wheel, jamming crumpled money into his hand. The raging ex-inspector was determined to get the golden-brown girl. His shot had missed her when Cap had knocked him to the sidewalk.

As Spike got to the sidewalk from the alley, the shooting in that narrow lane ceased abruptly. Even the shouts and curses of gangsters and the few policemen were cut off.

With this sudden hush, a man with a cap pulled over his eyes slithered from the alleyway. He appeared to be unarmed. Perhaps he was some casual citizen almost trapped in the shooting.

But he was holding a handkerchief over his face. Peter and Spike missed the significance of this. They thought the man had been wounded. Across the cleared sidewalk, the man reached the green coupé. The driver had it moving as the other man sprang in.

"Wait, Peter!" rapped out The Skipper, running toward the entrance to the alley.

But before entering, Cap halted, grinding his heels as he came to a stop. Then he as swiftly jumped back for the taxicab. The thing he had seen was unbelievable.

Nearly a dozen men lay on the hospital gallery and in the alleyway. The uniforms of policemen were mixed with the plain clothes of other men. But the bodies of all were motionless.

Some lay with their guns in their hands. These were still oddly pointed with stiffened fingers gripping them. All of the men were quiet. Their mouths gaped open.

The green coupé slid into traffic, but it did not follow the route taken by the golden-brown girl. Tarna Rodens already was almost lost to view more than a block away.

The green coupé with its two occupants turned across the parkway in the middle of the boulevard. It headed northward in the direction of the Miami

Beach causeway. Tarna Rodens had gone southward, toward the Little Miami River and Bayfront Drive, along the parks.

Cap heard the siren of a police squad car. He saw that this police car had been lying in wait. The coppers in it had picked up the girl's car, were trailing it.

CAP shoved Peter from behind the wheel.

"We follow that green coupé," he advised. "That's our only point to steer by out of all this."

"Hell!" rumbled Peter Doom. "The cops here will get some of the men who started the shooting, and they'll sweat something out of them!"

"You didn't see any one following the man who came from the alley, did you, Peter?" said Cap quietly. "None of the men who were in on the shooting will ever talk. Neither will the policemen who were in there."

"By my sacred aunt, Cap! You don't mean——"

"Exactly!" said Cap crisply. "Some one arranged very carefully that no man should fall into the hands of the police alive!"

"By the great hornspoon! It was awful!" declared Spike Briggs. "If I hadn't been following Peter, I'd have been in there!"

The hospital alleyway had been a death trap. Those who had not died by bullets were lying with their hands strangely twisted, as if they were clutching for air suddenly snatched from their lungs.

It would be some time before the shocked police department would get under way on these new murders. In the meantime, the two men in the green coupé must have believed they had made a clean get-away.

Doubtless they had heard the police car go hooting after the automobile driven by the girl. Their own coupé slid smoothly along, apparently attracting no attention.

Cap Fury handled a car much the same as he guided one of his streamlined boats. The taxicab apparently was not following any other car. The Skipper shifted from one street to another.

He counted on the men in the green coupé thinking they had wiped out pursuit. It being midwinter, night dusk came quickly. It was almost dark when the coupé swung from the boulevard into less reputable water-front streets.

Then the *Whirlwind* Skipper was given a surprise. Coming around a corner, the green coupé should have been in the block. But there was no automobile in sight. Small fish wharves lay along the bay on one side of the street.

But when Cap and his companions reached the wharves, there was no evidence of a boat having moved out. It was several minutes later before Cap ascertained the green coupé was setting under a ramshackle garage shed in the middle of the block.

The shed was on the property of a rambling, three-story frame building. A rickety sign proclaimed the place to be a boarding house. It was a sailors' lodging place, of the more unsavory order. One corner in the front housed a barroom.

"Drop out of sight, but keep an eye open," Cap instructed Peter and Spike. "But first, Peter, you'll take the wheel and unload me there at The Sailors' Rest."

THE SKIPPER got into the rear seat of the taxicab. Peter had driven it around the corner. Cap took some small articles from his pocket. A bit of wax under his lips, a close-fitting wig of black hair, dark shells of thin crystal over his keen, blue eyes, and captain John Fury of the *Whirlwind* became another person. He might have been a drunken sailor off any freighter in the bay.

In front of The Sailors' Rest, Cap rolled from the door of the taxicab. He shouted at the driver:

"You're a damn' robbin' pirate! I'm payin' yuh four bits, an' if you don't like that, come down offa your deck!"

The Skipper added several loud oaths. Apparently, the taxi driver thought this was a poor spot in which to become

embroiled. For at the shouting, four or five rough figures with hard faces poured from the door of the boarding-house barroom. Their attitude indicated it would be a pleasure to help a fellow sailor beat up one of these taxi-driving swabs.

Peter Doom had his hat pulled over his eyes. He accepted the half dollar Cap slapped into his hand. Then he hastily got into gear and rocked the taxi away out of the trouble zone.

The Skipper lurched across the side-

The screaming, battling inhabitants had to be rounded up.

walk. He boasted profanely of putting it over on the driver. Then he invited every one to come along and have a drink.

There were two dozen men in the dirty barroom. They surged up at the invitation. As they gulped the fiery liquor, Cap's glance took in the frowsy boarding-house clerk behind a desk, a narrow stairway leading to the upper floors, and the other rough appointments of the low-grade lodging house.

Apparently, The Skipper had been well-liquored when he entered. After two rounds of drinks, he weaved to a table, crashed into a chair and seemed almost at once to be snoring drunkenly.

But Cap automatically impressed every face upon his memory. Though it had been but momentary, he had fixed the features of one man in that green coupé in mind—the man who was driving. The other man's face had been concealed by his handkerchief.

The Skipper was convinced now that the face-hiding handkerchief had been used for the same purpose another one had been used when Royer Stannus was murdered. Swift, mysterious death had been released in the alleyway near the hospital.

The man he remembered in the green coupé was not in the barroom or the open lobby of the boarding house. The Skipper judged the pair must be on one of the floors above.

He decided to wait for a short interval, then engage a room. Since he was buying no more drinks, the roystering occupants of the bar paid no more attention to him. He was only another sailor with a few dollars to blow.

CAP realized the latest murders would probably call for some drastic action on the part of the police. The state authorities likely would be called in. The Skipper, for his own purposes, desired as much as possible to remain aloof from shore authority.

He had seen too much of the weaknesses of the shore law when it came to grips with major crimes. There could be no doubt now but that the murder of Royer Stannus had been only the beginning of some organized, mysterious attack upon society.

Cap's mind went briefly to the girl, Tarna Rodens. Why had she come seeking the man she had thought had blown up the Stannus yacht? What about that pistol concealed in her stocking? Had she intended that for the bandaged patient?

Then why had she shot one of the other men?

It must have been information the golden-brown girl was seeking. And The Skipper was fairly sure that by this time Tarna Rodens had fallen into the hands of the police. Cap would have preferred this not to happen.

But what was the mysterious element that had caused the swift deaths?

On this angle Cap now was concentrating. Though he was snoring raucously, his slitted eyes were missing nothing. The men in the room were the average type off fruit boats and other freighters. A few were of the deep-tanned caste suggesting they might be sponge fishermen from the gulf.

Suddenly, there was a disturbance at a near-by table. A huge, hairy-chested son of the sea reared up and bellowed.

"I'm tellin' yuh, no! Ship on your lousy lugger, huh? There ain't no swab in 'ere fool enough to go out on the mud of the Bahamas!"

A small man who had the air of being a small-boat owner, possibly a sponger, tried to smile the violent sailor down.

"Superstition, that's all," he protested. "I'm willin' to pay top wages, an' a share."

"Top wages, huh?" sneered the other man. "An' what good would top wages be doin' a man as turns black in the face an' falls dead? Look at what happened to the *Tallao!* Eleven of 'em, an' there they was floatin' around with their faces all bloated an' black!"

Another sailor put in, "That's right, Jack! Eleven of 'em! An' there's been others quit breathin' when they got close to that upper string of cays! You can keep your top wages, mister!"

The little man rubbed his hands and went out. The sailors took up the conversation. Cap learned that all seemed to be in deadly fear of some of the outer cays of the Bahamas. They said men died there on their boats—quit breathing—went bloated and turned black in their faces.

The Skipper's instant thought was, could there be any connection between this sailor's tale and the death that had struck in the gay resort city of Miami?

Just then, the frowsy clerk came from behind his desk.

"Pipe down on that stuff, you damn fools!" he growled. "It ain't good for business! They've been sayin' that senator swab an' them others yesterday got a dose of that same stuff!"

The clerk's small eyes were darting toward the stairway. He seemed fearful some one above might have heard the drunken sailors' roaring refusal to ship for the Bahamas.

Cap was sure the two men from the green coupé were in the unsavory place. He was about to move, thinking he would engage himself a room, when a hard voice came from the flight of stairs.

"Hey, Pete! Send up a quart an' three glasses! Make it snappy!"

THE SKIPPER continued snoring. One of the bartenders set a bottle and glasses on a dirty tray and clumped up-

stairs. The clerk said to him as he passed, "Last door back, on the third floor."

No sooner had the bartender departed than Cap got noisily to his feet. Over at the desk, he said, "Wanna room f'r the night!"

"All right, bully, it'll be two bucks," replied the clerk.

Cap scrawled uncertainly on the soiled register.

"An' y' can put me on the top floor, mister," he growled.

"That's what you think!" snarled the clerk. "Well, the whole third floor's took up, see! You'll take number twenty-two!"

So the third floor was taken. The clerk was not sending any one up there. Cap was about to assend to the second-floor room, when the clerk looked at him keenly.

"Come to think of it, buddy, I ain't never seen you around here before. You sit down a while, an' maybe there'll be a room for you."

The clerk's eyes again darted toward the stairway. The bartender was clumping back down. Cap's eyes took in the open street door. The thin shadow of Peter Doom was merged with a tree.

"Said I was goin' up to a room!" snapped The Skipper, suddenly.

He purposely made his tone belligerent. If there were any hook-up between this boarding house for sailors and the mystery killers, it would be well to establish it at once.

The frowsy clerk gave an almost imperceptible signal. Out of the tail of his eye, Cap counted six burly men arising in the barroom. The Skipper remained before the desk, his feet firmly planted. For the purpose of being in the hospital, he was not wearing his famous sea boots.

There was the comforting pressure of the automatic in his right sleeve, but such a rough-house as might ensue in the barroom was not of the brand to call for shooting. Without moving, Cap suddenly pursed his lips into a shrill whistle.

This had the carrying trill of a bos'n's command.

"By hell! I thought there was something!" rasped the frowsy clerk, reaching under his desk.

Whatever the clerk sought, a gun or a bludgeon, it was not forthcoming. That astounded fellow felt hands like iron claws fasten suddenly on the side of his neck. Cap's steel-arms snapped.

THE clerk arose in the air, his feet clearing his desk. He went up and over The Skipper's head, his flying body smashing into one of the several apparent bouncers moving from the barroom.

The Skipper whipped around. Three men were almost upon him. Another pair was circling to take him from the other side. Cap's stocky legs jerked once. Even as fists swung for his head, he was standing on the clerk's desk.

From this vantage of height, he jumped, both feet kicking out. Two men were toed neatly under the chin. They went to the floor. In the barroom, tables crashed and chairs went over. Here was a scrap, and a scrapper who could hand it out.

Before Cap could recover his balance, some one swung a filled bottle. The glass broke and clipped solidly on Cap's skull. For a few seconds, he staggered dazedly. Still he did not make use of the automatic.

These bouncers might be exercising only their job of getting rid of an objectionable customer. One of the burly bouncers was swinging a chair. The weapon would have splintered on Cap's head had not interference come with a yelling oath from another direction.

"Sweet Davy Jones! You low-life swab!"

That was Spike Briggs. Spike was half the size of any of the big fellows surrounding Cap. But the tough first

officer of the *Whirlwind* had arrived in the midst of his lifelong element. Grubby fists whirled with the speed of a ripsaw and with about the same effect.

The man who was swinging the chair caught the full impact at the base of his skull. The chair fell, and the bouncer jammed his hard head into Cap's stomach. Two other men were upon him, so Cap used one knee expertly in the nearest man's stomach.

"By all the green-blue hells, what's what?" rumbled the voice of Peter Doom.

Peter was long and thin. His arms were like bony rails. His fists were not so effective at short range, but when he came in swinging them at length, a man tumbled each time the knuckles hit.

A bottle broke over Spike's tough skull. The first mate shook blood from his eyes, and it looked as if he was about to take a dive for the floor. But the lunge of his body carried his head into the bottle-wielder's stomach.

That fellow sat down. Blood seeped from his lips. No doubt a rib or two had been cracked.

Of the original half dozen men who had assailed Cap, none now was on his feet. The frowsy clerk had crawled behind his desk. This time he got what he was reaching for. A wicked revolver poked over the blotted register.

THE SKIPPER barely caught the movement of the clerk's hand. Then he went smashing backward, even as the gun flamed. Cap felt the scorching of the powder. But his two hundred pounds of hard bone and muscle jammed through the flimsy front of the desk.

The frowsy clerk was caught in an odd manner. The flat top of the desk struck his throat and pinned his head to the wall.

The Skipper whirled toward the narrow stairs. The occupants of the barroom were standing in awesome regard of the havoc which had been wrought in less than half a minute. The tough bouncers of The Sailors' Rest lay on the floor.

Spike Briggs mopped blood from his ugly, scarred face and bared his teeth at the sailors in the bar. He now had a broken bottle in one hand and part of a chair in the other. None moved toward him.

"Up this way, quick!" ordered The Skipper. "The fellows we want to see are on the third floor!"

Cap's automatic was in his hand now. He was convinced the killers of the mystery choking death were in that third-floor room. Or they had been. The noise of the brawl below probably had brought them out.

The Skipper covered five steps at a jump, going up. There was no movement of pursuit from below. Those in the barroom had not yet recovered from the swift shock of what had happened. Tough sailors that they were, this was the first sample they had ever had of the *Whirlwind* crew in action.

Cap's hand cautioned Peter and Spike to hold back. On the rickety bare boards of the third floor, he heard the sudden shuffling of feet. Cap squeezed over to the wall, still moving upward. There were only small light bulbs in the dim upper halls.

The Skipper reached the second floor. He saw a man's white face at the top of the third-floor flight. The face vanished. Then a black cat jumped out and leaped up the stairs ahead.

CHAPTER VII.

BLACK CAT FOR LUCK.

THAT black cat was scared. He was spitting and snarling. The animal's immediate purpose was climbing to safety. He took the third-floor flight of stairs in great leaps.

Cap Fury was halfway up this flight. He believed the men who had ordered the liquor sent up were making a get-

away. Perhaps they had imagined the police had trailed them here.

Peter Doom was close behind Cap. Then The Skipper halted.

The fleeing black cat had reached the third floor. The little animal gave a final jump from the stairs. It was as if the cat had been struck by a bullet in mid-air.

All of the cat's feet were rigidly spread. A cat always lands on its feet, it is said. This one did not. Like some missile turning upon itself, the cat struck on its back at the edge of the top step.

The furry black body rolled down. The cat's forefeet were spread as if they had been striking at some invisible enemy. Its red tongue stuck out, and the mouth looked as if it had suddenly been propped open.

Cap uttered no word. He acted with swift dispatch. His body was hurled backward without regard for Peter and Spike behind him. Rather, he intentionally smashed his full weight into Peter; and the two of them rolled Spike over and over to the bottom of the stairs.

As they hit the second floor, Cap heaved Peter to one side. Spike hit with a bump and an oath.

"Sweet Davy Jones, Cap!" yelled the first mate. "What hit yuh?"

The Skipper pointed silently to the black cat. The animal was rigid and very dead.

"What killed him?" said Peter.

"Probably what was intended for us," said Cap quietly. "We'll wait a few minutes before we go up."

On the first floor, some of the men were moving as if to follow up the stairs. Cap caught the dead black cat by the tail. He gave it a toss, and it landed at the feet of the men below.

Frightened oaths bellowed from the throats of sailors.

Cap heard one man swear and yell, "The choker! The Bahamas choker! It got that cat!"

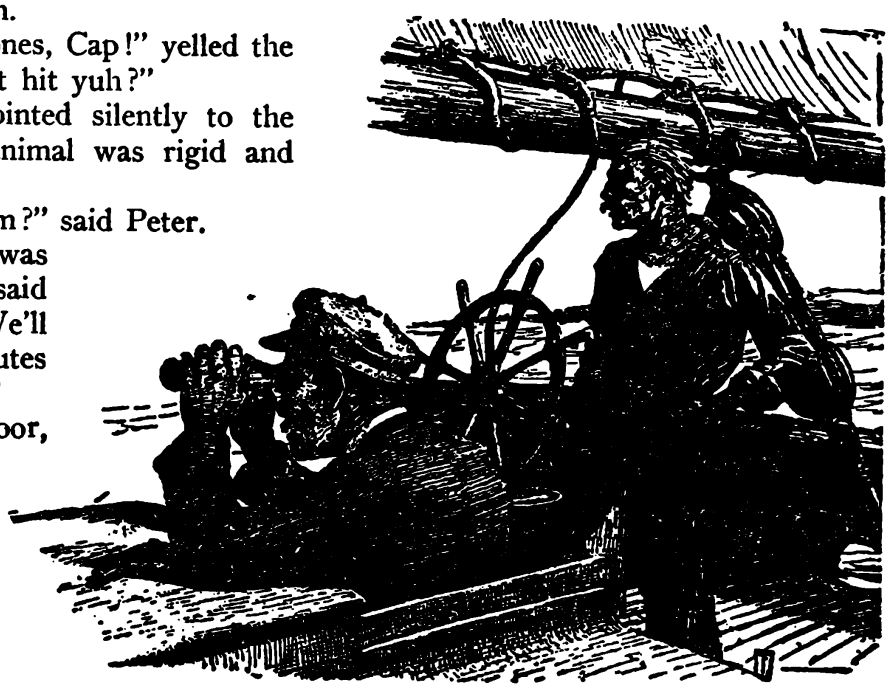
There was an immediate rush below for the outside.

Cap wished for one of his oxygen masks, but he had none. The old boarding house became silent. Not a board creaked. In a few minutes, Cap went cautiously up the stairs.

THERE had been three men on the third floor. One man still was there. Perhaps he had not been equipped for what had happened. There now was no suspicion of lingering gas or other poisonous element in the air.

But this man lay in the dimly lighted hallway. His fingers were clawed into the flesh of his throat. His mouth was open. The face already was turning black.

The Skipper got to an open window at the end of the hallway. This opened on a shed roof. The green coupé was



gone from the shed. Peter Doom called out.

"Here's something funny, Cap!"

This was a small ring of metal. It was lying on the floor near the dead man. The metal was cheap. It was a man's ring. Cap turned it over in his hand. There had been a small setting, like a tiny crystal globe. This had been broken, perhaps crushed under a man's foot.

Yet except for that fragment of thin glass, there was no evidence the ring was connected with what had happened. Not the faintest odor or trace of any possible poison lingered.

"Peter," said Cap, "I believe this is beyond anything we have ever encountered. If this ring is the answer to these deaths, and there is no trace left, no more dangerous force has ever been released in the world."

And from the lips of high authority soon was to come confirmation of The Skipper's belief.

Cap and his companions saw no one as they left The Sailors' Rest. The motley crowd from the barroom had evaporated. Only the clerk remained unconscious behind his desk. They left him there.

Soon the police would have another murder mystery on their hands. Captain Cross was not looking forward with any degree of pleasure to possible complications arising from the tragedies at the hospital.

He returned with Spike Briggs to the *Whirlwind,* leaving to Peter Doom an interview with the commissioner of public safety. And when Peter came from that interview, the figure of one of the nation's best-known governors had come into the picture.

"GOVERNOR MARBLEDAY'S yacht came into the bay this afternoon," Peter informed Cap. "The governor is from Royer Stannus's State. He went at once to the Miami commissioner. Cap, you said you thought these murders might only be the beginning. And you are right."

Peter said then that Governor Marbleday had received warning by wireless aboard his yacht that Royer Stannus was to be murdered. And this was to be but merely the start of an organized movement, which Governor Marbleday was warned by a mysterious voice would take over control of his State.

"Governor Marbleday's operator took the message," said Peter. "The commissioner here is very much up in the air, but he had a copy of it made."

Cap took the message which had been received aboard the yacht of Governor Marbleday at sea the day before. The yacht had at that time been in the vicinity of the northern Bahama Islands. Cap noted this circumstance.

The message was an amazing piece of effrontery. Had it been unaccompanied by the murder terror that within twenty-four hours had struck at Miami, it might have been laid to an unbalanced mind. It read:

YOUR EXCELLENCY:

You will prepare to turn over the affairs of your State to a dictator we shall designate within the next ten days. Your tenure of office endures for another year. During that period, you will observe rules of procedure in government which will be transmitted to you. These will include the placing of all State receipts in the hands of the dictator. Only possession of an unusual power, a force beyond estimate in the control of human affairs, inspires this order. You do not have to keep this secret. Publicity, appeal to the police, even the military forces at your command cannot affect us adversely. Simply, we are taking over your State. Later, we shall assume a much wider dictatorship over America. We know you are coming to Miami for a conference with Royer Stannus, your senatorial candidate. The conference will never take place. When you arrive, Royer Stannus, perhaps many others will be dead. You will learn something of this, then you are advised that it is as easy to bring about the death of thousands as of a

few. It can be done by a force which none can discover until after it has struck. It is a power that never before existed on earth, and it is in our hands. You will await our further message.

"The message came out of the air, unsigned," stated Peter Doom. "Now, Cap, what developed from the setting in that ring? Perhaps that will give us some kind of a lead."

Captain Fury had a grimly set face. Nothing had developed from the ring picked up in The Sailors' Rest. Undoubtedly, quick death had come from it. That death had been intended to trap The Skipper and his men as they went up the stairs.

The mysterious force had killed only one of the men accompanying the wielder and the black cat. And the lucky black cat had saved the three from the *Whirlwind*.

"There is no trace of any known or unknown chemical force left in the setting of the ring," admitted Cap. "I have made all possible tests. Here in the bay are some persons who must know. And you say, Peter, the police have got that girl, Tarna Rodens?"

"They have the girl," stated Peter. "Got her in the car she took away from me with your help."

"The police never will make her talk," said Cap. "Possibly they lack the means to make any other person talk. Peter, our job is laid out for us. Some one is going to speak."

There were methods of compelling speech aboard the *Whirlwind*. When the occasion arose, they were applied relentlessly. There was, for example, the old whipping post on the upper deck of the mystery ship.

Cap Fury had never applied his methods of compelling speech to a woman. He was not sure now he was even justified in believing Tarna Rodens was directly involved in the mystery murders.

Whatever might have been his decision, The Skipper was not to have the opportunity to question the golden-brown girl.

TARNA RODENS was at this moment quartered in a solitary cell. This was in the women's quarters of the jail on the fourteenth floor of the tallest building in the State of Florida. No safer place for the detention of any criminal could have been devised than this floor of Miami's "skyscraper courthouse."

The jail floor was reached only by two elevators. There were no fire escapes on the building of granite and steel. The golden-brown girl, staring from the barred window out over Biscayne Bay, could surely have held no hope of escape.

In the stone corridor, Tarna Rodens could see three uniformed guards. These guards met each elevator when it stopped. Their guns were handy. Moreover, the elevator operators never admitted more than one outside visitor at a time.

The guards had been informed that the commissioner himself, accompanied by Governor Marbleday, a visitor, were to come up within an hour to personally question the beautiful prisoner. The preliminary questioning of the police had elicited no information.

When they had demanded why Tarna Rodens had entered the hospital, she only stared at them as if she had lost her memory. The police were sorely puzzled. Whatever her connection with the attack, it was certain she had committed no crime for which she could be held.

For Tarna Rodens had been the fiancée of Royer Stannus. And at the hospital, she had only shot a man who was in the act of attempting to kill Cap Fury. This was hardly sufficient to hold the young woman. The commissioner of public safety was justifiably worried about the proper procedure.

The commissioner and Governor Marbleday had not arrived. But shortly after nightfall, a short, fat man entered one of the elevators. When the operator questioned him, he presented a small card that bore the signature of the visiting governor. The fat man said he was to meet Governor Marbleday and the commissioner in the jail.

THE operator was satisfied. He shot the cage upward.

The elevator stopped at the fourteenth floor. When its grilled door opened, there was only a caged corridor of grim stone and steel. Massive doors were locked. Sitting in a lone cell, Tarna Rodens was as immovable and as lovely as a classical, carved statue.

The haunted fear in the girl's wide, brown eyes might have been evident to any one closely observing. Otherwise, the golden-brown young woman appeared calm almost to the point of stupor.

When the short, fat man—whose lower chin rolled on his collar—stepped from the elevator, Tarna Rodens was staring at the door. Her whole body became tense. Two guards stepped quickly to the opening cage. Their hands caressed their guns, but dropped when they saw the inoffensiveness of the fat man.

The man smiled, "I'm to wait for the commissioner and the governor here. We are to interview the young woman who was brought in."

"O. K., mister," grunted one of the guards. "I'll just give you the once-over."

This guard stepped close to the fat man. The elevator operator lingered with his cage. It was his duty to make sure the visitor was all right.

The fat man apparently had a white handkerchief balled in one hand. As the guard touched under his armpits, the man lifted both hands. But one hand did not rise above his head. It stopped at his face. The balled handkerchief spread over his mouth and nostrils.

The tinkle of breaking glass was so faint, some extra auditory perception would have been necessary to detect it. The guard making the search could not have paused more quickly if a devastating bullet had suddenly plowed through his brain.

The guard's hands spread away from the fat man's armpits. His lower jaw slacked and his tongue lapped out, as if it would reach some air that had abruptly been pulled from his lungs. Then he went back on his heels, mouth gaping open, body teetering.

CHAPTER VIII.

BUMPS FALLS FOR A GIRL.

THE two other guards in the fourteenth-floor corridor moved less than a foot from their tracks. One dropped his gun in order to set the claws of his fingers into the flesh of his throat.

Behind the short, fat man, the elevator operator, a gray-haired fellow, let go of the controls and lay down on the floor of the cage. The fat man kept his handkerchief firmly over his mouth and nostrils. His mild, pale eyes surveyed the four other men.

There was in the fat man's attitude something almost like sympathy, as if he were saying to himself, "Too bad, boys, but it had to be done."

Then he spoke aloud across the fifty feet or more of space separating him from the girl in the cell.

"Stay back, Miss Rodens, close to your open window for a few seconds. Don't breathe."

The fat man allowed half a minute, no more. Tarna Rodens was standing now. Her slender, brown hands covered her eyes.

"How much more horror? How much more?" she murmured brokenly.

It would have seemed the golden-brown girl must have known exactly

what was happening. The fat man pushed his handkerchief and some small device that had the appearance of a black rubber mouthpiece back into his pocket.

For his weight and mildness, he moved with remarkable speed. The cell keys came from a guard's pocket. Within two minutes, the fat man had stripped to his underwear and removed the clothes of the smallest of the guards.

He was wearing the guard's clothes when he opened the oiled lock of Tarna Rodens's cell. The golden-brown girl walked toward him like some person in the midst of a bad dream.

"This can't go on—it can't!" she sobbed.

The fat man said gently, "It is best you do not talk, Miss Rodens. You are a sweet person, and I would regret very much having to leave you here with these others. But this little affair wouldn't be heard twenty feet away."

The man was pointing a flat automatic which no more than filled the palm of his hand. Its muzzle was inclosed by a slightly larger cylinder, a modern silencer.

"I must live," stated the girl, in a trancelike tone. "Yes, I must live and go with you, for I have yet to find him."

"Wise girl," approved the fat man. "The boss wants you brought to him."

He moved with the girl toward the elevator containing the dead operator. He was shoving the body into the corridor when the motor of the adjoining cage started humming. The second elevator was coming up swiftly.

ONE man was in the second cage with the operator. About the time the fat man was exchanging clothes with one of the guards, the good-humored Bumps McCarthy had appeared on the lower floor of the courthouse.

Bumps was carrying his movie camera. The elevator operator looked him over.

"Nothing doing for you news pests!" the operator said grumpily. "Nobody goes up in this cage! Its only stop is the jail floor an' them movie boxes ain't allowed!"

Bumps's round face showed an ingratiating grin.

"The commissioner and this Governor Marbleday gone up yet to see that Miss Rodens?" he said in an offhand manner. "I was to be set up for an interview with sound. They think maybe she'll spill what she knows."

"Old stuff—old stuff, smart guy!" snapped the operator.

"What'll I tell the commissioner when he finds I haven't been able to get ready. You see, mister, this may put a movie confession on record, and she couldn't repudiate it later."

The elevator man scratched his head. His job depended on the good will of the commissioner. Then Bumps produced an engraved card. It bore the commissioner's name. In ink were the words, "Permit this man to pass."

The operator was not a handwriting expert.

"That's different," he growled. "And why didn't you say so in the first place?"

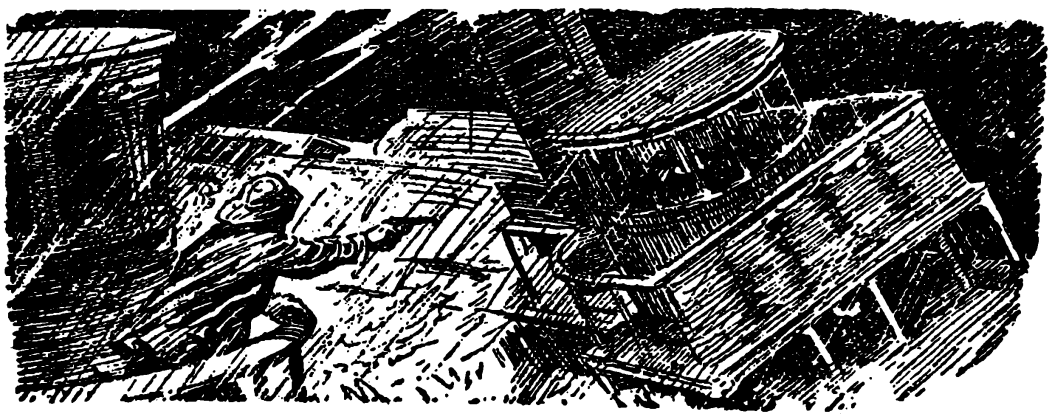
Bumps moved into the cage with his camera. The elevator shot upward. It stopped at the fourteenth floor. As the grilled door opened, a man in the blue uniform of a guard was standing to one side.

"Well, what the hell's going——"

The elevator operator had a gun. He clawed for it. But his hand dropped. The fat man, with Tarna Rodens standing behind him, struck viciously with his balled right hand. The hard metal of the flat gun crunched on the operator's skull.

Bumps McCarthy was faster than his bulk denoted. He was armed with two pistols. His camera banged the cage floor, and his hands went inside his coat.

"Don't do it, fellow!" barked the fat man, his automatic pushing into Bumps's



belly. "Just leave your camera there and pull that operator out! If I have to leave you up here with him, you won't have any chance to talk!"

Bumps looked over the fat man's shoulder. The wide, brown eyes of the girl with the golden face were beseeching.

"Don't," she whispered. "He will do as he says."

"That's sensible," said the fat man as Bumps dragged the operator from the cage. "So you're a movie man, huh? I'll bet the boss can use you. So we'll go down."

WITH the small, silenced automatic back in the fat man's coat pocket, but gently touching his spine, Bumps ran the elevator down. As the cage dropped, the fat man expertly removed Bumps's two automatics with his left hand.

"Only the guards have permits for guns," he suggested. "When we reach the lower corridor, you will walk beside me. Miss Rodens, you will be on the other side. I will be holding your wrist. That will look all right."

Had there been an additional guard downstairs, acquainted with those on the fourteenth floor, trouble might have broken quickly. But there was only a nearsighted doorman and two colored boys who were cleaning up.

The fat man in the guard's uniform moved confidently. To all appearance, he was conducting the girl prisoner and a cameraman to the outside. The old doorman didn't know about that. It was several minutes before this doorman became curious concerning the absence of the elevator operators.

When he ran the empty cage to the fourteenth floor, it was too late. The fat man was sitting then between Bumps McCarthy and the girl in the rear seat of a curtained sedan.

The sedan had a driver and another man in the front seat. It was driven rapidly southward. Bumps saw they were following South Miami Avenue. They passed through Coral Gables and turned along a blue canal cut through the white coral formation.

The sedan whispered through the silent residence section of Coconut Grove, south of the International Airport.

Bumps suggested, "Well, spill it, mister. What's it all about? Are we taking a plane? I get airsick."

The short, fat killer seemed to be of a most genial disposition.

"Is that so?" he smiled. "A movie cameraman airsick? Never knew you fellows had stomachs. So we won't take a plane. I'll speak to the boys about it."

For a murderer, the fat man was a mild kidder. Bumps considered his position. The pistol against his side persuaded him conversation would only be wasted. He had gone to the courthouse by an arrangement made by Peter Doom. Would Peter and Cap Fury have any lead that might result in rescue?

Bumps decided they would not have. He could see the wide eyes of the golden-brown girl shining in the darkness. She had just been snatched from a jail cell, yet it impressed Bumps she seemed to be as much a prisoner as himself.

Bumps could see the delicate oval face. The natural red lips were deliciously modeled. Was the girl silently appealing to him? She seemed to be silently imploring him to stand by her.

THE red-headed cameraman had a feeling that seldom came to his hard-boiled senses. Under other circumstances, here was a girl who might be well worth going for. He had a shivery sensation, as if fate had put him in this position for a purpose.

All right, then. If he could be of any help, he would play along. He couldn't very well do otherwise. So she had been the fiancée of this great Royer Stannus? Well, he didn't blame Stannus. And, dammit, Stannus was dead.

Bumps was not in a situation to feel good. But he got a warm, tingly feeling. Somehow, he didn't believe this girl had wanted to be rescued in just this manner.

The fat man had said they were not taking a plane. The sedan rolled through Coconut Grove. It arrived on the high coral shore of another deep, blue canal. During boom times, a visionary real-estate man had planned boat channels into the heart of Coral Gables.

The blue canals were meant to make this favored spot another Venice. The sedan turned off the concrete into a side road bordering the canal. It followed the rough road toward lower Biscayne Bay. Bumps saw the wide expanse of water just ahead. So they were being taken to a boat somewhere.

That was better, in Bumps's estimation. The *Whirlwind* adventurers functioned more perfectly on the water. This was putting him closer to Cap Fury. He strained forward, thinking perhaps he might see what manner of vessel was waiting.

"Sorry, have to do it," said the fat man suddenly, apologetically.

"Oh, how could you?" cried the golden-brown girl, and then she screamed.

One of Bumps's own automatics swung in the fat man's hand. Its impact would have dented the skull of a stone-age man. Bumps only gasped and slumped forward into darkness. The last thing he heard was the girl's cry. It lingered with him and caused him to have fiery dreams.

But he did not see the craft on which he and the girl were placed two minutes later. Nor did Bumps know the girl pillowed his head and sopped water on the gash over his ear with an inadequate handkerchief.

WHILE new consternation was gripping the authorities over the third strike of the breathless death in the courthouse

jail, Cap Fury was entertaining uninvited visitors aboard the disreputable-looking old *Whirlwind*.

And because of that visit to the rusty tanker, none could say that two men who might have been suspected had anything directly to do with the jail delivery of Tarna Rodens. For among the visitors were Jammer Cartnel and Dude Stavano, the partner of the dead Swank Paka.

Jammer Cartnel, Dude Stavano and two dozen other yacht owners of Millionaires' Row were approaching the *Whirlwind* at the exact moment four men were choking to death in the skyscraper jail. The visitors arrived in three launches. One of these was operated by an assistant harbor master.

The *Whirlwind* Skipper said to Peter Doom as the boats swung alongside, "Not only are we to be informed our company isn't wanted on this exclusive anchorage, but I have an idea we may have come to be suspected in connection with these murders."

Both facts were plainly written in the faces of the yacht owners. The assistant harbor master acted as spokesman and, backed by the several millionaires, he was abrupt and scornful.

When all had come up the Jacob's ladder, the harbor official glanced contemptuously at the black-rusted decks, the smelly tops of oil tanks and at the scattered, untidy gear lying about the *Whirlwind* foredeck.

Cap Fury was again in his baggy uniform and his great sea boots. He was a ruddy-faced figure with whimsical blue eyes which appeared deceptively apologetic.

"If I had been informed in advance, I'd have had the crew spruce up a bit," stated The Skipper. "You see, we're not much on throwing parties or entertaining."

The Skipper grinned broadly at the harbor official. That worthy thumbed a buttonhole of his spick-and-span uniform.

"These gentlemen," he said crisply, indicating the yachtsmen, "have asked me to request the removal of this filthy freighter from their holding grounds. You can well see, Captain Fury, a ship of the kind you command is hardly a pleasing sight to tourists visiting our beautiful bay."

"WELL, damn my eyes!" spoke up Spike Briggs, his scarred face leering. "Ain't good enough for these playboy swabs, huh? 'Cause we don't wear brass an' gilt, I suppose we're held too cheap to be flockin' with the easy-money hulls!"

"Spike!" said Cap sharply. "Get a half hitch around your tongue, and you will conduct our guests below for a drink!"

"Haven't even got discipline, have you, Captain Fury?" sneered the harbor official. "I don't know that we want to be entertained in your limited quarters. We are requesting you to have anchor up before daylight and move, or some action will have to be taken."

Jammer Cartnel said, "Now, now, that ain't the spirit! The captain said we'd have a drink! We'll have it, and thank you, captain!"

Jammer was drunk again, or perhaps still drunk. The events of the past hours apparently bore down upon him heavily. Dude Stavano stood silently by, saying nothing.

Others of the yacht owners were loath to go below, but Jammer Cartnel prevailed. The scarred face of Spike Briggs lighted up.

"I'll be seein' you to The Skipper's limited quarters!" he leered at the harbor official. "Of course, we ain't got nothin' like what the playboys can buy with their millions, but we can always dig up a tot of rum!"

Peter Doom spoke quietly to Cap.

"You think it's a good idea, Cap? What's on your mind?"

Cap spoke softly. "Peter, will you see to Jammer Cartnel's drink. Make it special."

The several millionaires found themselves clumping down poorly lighted companion stairs. Spike did not favor them with the swift, modern elevator. A door opened before them. No doubt these winter playboys imagined the "tot of rum," the service and the surroundings in the old freighter would be something to write home about.

Spike said mockingly, "Gentlemen, be seated. I'll see about dishin' up some grog."

The harbor official dropped his thumb from his buttonhole. Even his limited vision recognized class when he saw it.

"Holy Jehosaphat!" gasped one of the yacht owners, whose trim vessel was rated at three-quarters of a million.

Varied exclamations came from the other yacht owners. Their own cabins might be sumptuous, but there was none but would have looked cheap compared to the luxuriously fitted quarters of The Skipper.

A YACHT owner laid his hand on a carved, long table. Its ebony, inlaid with gold and gems, and the proof it had been made by hands in their grave for centuries afforded a value that could well have been traded for everything aboard his white yacht.

Golden fish, strange creatures from the deepest oceans swam in crystal tanks. Beyond this showed the gleaming instruments of a laboratory of unique design.

A square diving well, flanked by cases of shining armor for deep-sea work occupied the center of the cabin. Many panels of chrome steel and black filled the walls. The long room of communications displayed types of radios with which these millionaires were still unfamiliar.

Spike Briggs grinned scornfully at the harbor official.

"Tot of rum comin' up!" he sneered.

The drinks came in rare glasses and goblets, survival of an ancient dynasty of the Orient.

"And, by the gods!" boomed Jammer Cartnel. "We come askin' this tramp captain to move his old ship off our nice, exclusive yacht anchorage! Me? I'm damn well askin' pardon, Captain Fury!"

The Skipper was watching Jammer Cartnel. This burst of friendliness belied the narrowing of the politician's eyes as he took in the contents of the cabin. Cap saw that Cartnel's gaze stuck longest to the inner diving well and the deep-sea armor. But he smiled at Cartnel and nodded.

Cap had seen Peter Doom prepare Jammer Cartnel's goblet of rum. Now The Skipper walked over and talked to Dude Stavano.

The numbers racketeer partner of the dead Swank Paka spoke as a man always on his guard—pleasant enough, but telling nothing. Before the second round of drinks, Jammer Cartnel was weaving on his feet.

Cap was laying a careful plan. He said to Stavano, "Have you ever seen the fish with electrical eyes from five miles down?"

"Don't know much about fish," growled Stavano. "You got some?"

"I'll show you," stated Cap, moving toward the aquarium.

THE SKIPPER saw that Stavano was watching Jammer Cartnel closely. Peter Doom had made two drinks for Jammer, and they were very special. Jammer was sprawling uncouthly in a big chair.

The yacht owners were boisterous. They seemed to have forgotten the tragedies which had caused many to leave the bay. Cap was stepping into the aquarium with Dude Stavano, when

the standard broadcast radio announced a bulletin.

It broke into the cabin with the effect of a bolt of lightning.

Up to this moment, the name of Tarna Rodens had not been mentioned. It had been Cap's intention to see that both Jammer Cartnel and Stavano remained behind when the other visitors departed. Then he intended using some of his own methods to discover more about the golden-brown girl and several other things.

But that radio bulletin came like a catastrophe.

Tarna Rodens had been snatched from the courthouse jail. Four more men had been mysteriously choked to death. The commissioner of public safety and the visiting Governor Marbleday had been balked in questioning the girl. The authorities were preparing to declare martial law, to shut in the resort city.

Though he had been on the verge of being knocked out, Jammer Cartnel staggered to his feet, cursing. He groped confusedly toward the stairs. The other yacht owners were moving. Each seemed to think this new development threatened him directly.

Added to this, the radio broadcast announced:

"An order has been issued for an embargo on all boats now in city anchorage. None are to be permitted to leave the bay."

Jammer Cartnel was glaring wildly around. He shouted thickly:

"None of us are safe! First, they arrest Tarna Rodens! Now, the enemies of Royer Stannus have got her! Come on!"

Apparently the fog caused by the drug Peter Doom had put in his drinks had thoroughly confused Cartnel. He seemed to forget Dude Stavano.

Cap saw his guests leaving without ceremony. They were rushing for the stairs. Beside him, Dude Stavano had rapped out an oath.

"It's some damned trick! They can't keep the yachts here! I'm going to go——"

The Skipper's whole plan underwent a change. He would let Jammer Cartnel go for the present. But he cut off Dude Stavano's speech abruptly. Cap's square-ended fingers caught the Dude's neck.

It was not so much a blow as a swift pinching under the jaw. Duke Stavano's eyes glazed. He forgot the rest of his words. Cap pushed him down behind one of the deep-sea tanks.

Peter Doom and Spike Briggs were looking to The Skipper for orders. Cap's lips moved.

"Interfere with no one," he said. "Probably they will not notice the absence of Stavano."

Jammer Cartnel had not noticed. The others were not concerned. The harbor official saw trouble ahead and was among the first ones out. Their launches were putting off when Cap called Peter Doom.

"That means they've got Bumps at the courthouse. Peter, I've an idea we are soon to leave Biscayne Bay, embargo or no embargo."

Peter looked at Dude Stavano's figure with a grim smile.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN DUDE TALKED.

THE SKIPPER did not seem worried by the bay having been closed to departures. In fact, he was issuing orders to Spike Briggs and Hurricane Dan, the second mate.

"Have everything cleared for sailing," he instructed. "If they are attempting to block the sea channel, some one may be due for a surprise. In the meantime, Hurrisane Dan, you may prepare the post."

With Spike and Hurricane Dan gone

topside, Cap turned to the unconscious Dude Stavano. Peter Doom watched the manipulation of nerve centers in Stavano's neck. The racketeer slowly opened his eyes.

Hurricane Dan was coming through the cabin. He said, "The post is ready, sir. Shall I remove the scum topside?"

Dude Stavano started to spout an oath. The Skipper merely nodded. One black-haired arm, as thick as the foreleg of a bull, wrapped around Dude's body. He was snapped off his feet. The pressure brought ominous crackings from his ribs. His feet beat uselessly.

The immense Hurricane Dan carried the sleek-haired fellow as easily as he might have a baby. When Stavano started to yell, Hurricane Dan used blunt fingers to firmly compress his nose.

Dude Stavano was set on his feet on the upper deck. This was beside what had looked like the top of an old oil tank amidships. But that rusty top had divided.

In the center stood what looked like an old wooden cross. It was a great, clumsy affair of teakwood. This wood was so old it was pitted. Perhaps in past centuries that same old cross had stood on some plantation of the Spanish Main.

No doubt the blood of lashed slaves was responsible for some of the dark stains on the pitted wood. There were only two parts of iron. These were rusty, but they had been oiled. They were wrist manacles stapled into the horizontal arm of the cross.

Dude Stavano sneered through the aperture where his teeth were missing.

"You can't scare me! You couldn't pull anything like that right here in the bay! All I've got to do is yell, and then——"

Hurricane Dan rocked Stavano's head with the flat of his hand and ripped off his shirt all with one motion.

"The trouble is," said Cap quietly, "that fellows like Dude Stavano are coddled too much by the shore law. They need some of the salt of the sea. Ready to talk, Stavano?"

Only vile oaths spilled out, and the whip descended again. The sleek-haired racketeer heaved against the post, but the rusty manacles held.

On his second scream came a sudden humming. Darkness lay over the bay and the *Whirlwind*. The anchorage was a huge bowl dotted with riding lights. Small boats were moving about.

But this humming became a sudden thunder. The light on the *Whirlwind* revealed the stripped man plainly at the whipping post. A plane swooped low, crossing the bay. The wind of its propeller beat was so close it struck upon the faces of the men on the deck.

Dude Stavano's head sagged. He was mumbling. The Skipper said, "What is it, Stavano? Where is this stuff? Where's the Choker—the Bahamas' Choker?"

Stavano muttered words. Only Cap caught them. They did not seem to make sense, but they were direct.

"Longitude 77 east, Latitude 24 north."

"Who is the Choker?" went on Cap relentlessly. "Who is he, Stavano?"

The answer to that never was to be given. There was the sudden thunder of that plane coming back. It was a big amphibian. It was flying so low, it seemed it must crash the wireless masts of the *Whirlwind*.

The keen eyes of The Skipper picked out a white face in the forward cockpit of the plane. And then he saw the extended arm. The plane had only seconds to go to pass directly over the circle of light on the *Whirlwind*.

A small object hurtled from the speeding plane. The pilot's aim had been accurate. Whatever that missile was, it struck the tip of the horizontal beam on the whipping post. There was the slightest tinkle like breaking glass.

Dude Stavano sagged farther do vn

on his limp arms. His raised face showed white, agonized; then, it slowly turned as black as his hair.

Dude Stavano would never tell more. He had come to the end of the rap he could not beat. Society had been purged of one more rat—one more of the kind that once had tortured and killed the younger brother of Captain Fury of the *Whirlwind*. For it was in that remembrance that lay much of The Skipper's ruthlessness.

CHAPTER X.

DEATH UNDER THE BAY.

THE slim wireless masts of the yacht *Petrel* were silhouetted by the brief, blinding glare. These masts were toppling.

The *Petrel* was only about one hundred yards away.

Cap Fury ordered tersely, "Get the *Whirlwind* moving slowly toward the sea channel!"

Spike and Peter Doom accompanied The Skipper. They were rowed by four sailors in one of the small boats. Cap estimated they had a possible fifteen minutes before they could cut across shoal water and intercept the *Whirlwind* moving at slow speed.

What could this newest disaster mean? Jammer Cartnel had gone back to the *Petrel* in a daze brought about by drugged drinks. What then was this latest strike in the night?

The *Petrel* had not been as thoroughly dismembered as had the yacht *Flamingo*. The Skipper's small boat danced on receding waves of the blast. The explosion had been toward the stern of the trim yacht.

Cap saw the yacht had been slit through the hull. The after-deck portion with the cabin superstructure had settled. The bow of the yacht stuck up grotesquely. On this riven forestructure, several men were clinging.

The yacht captain of the cold, gray eyes was perched in the bow with his men. Cap shot a light from the small boat upon him. The yacht captain looked down with a white-faced curse.

"I told them to keep an eye on your filthy old ship!" he yelled at The Skipper. "Something happened to Jammer Cartnel when he visited you! Some one handed him knockout drops! I put him to bed back there in his cabin, and then it began to happen!"

Cap saw the new explosion had come from some outside source. The visible yacht plates were buckled in. All the after part of the yacht had sunk in a few fathoms of water.

"Cartnel was still in there?" said Cap. "Then you let a boat get close to you? Another rowboat, was it?"

"Cartnel was still in there, you damn sea eel!" squawked the yacht captain. "There wasn't any boat! After that other blast, I've had a watch on all points! There wasn't anything, until one man yelled 'big fish!' "

"The shock's put him off balance," rumbled Peter Doom. "I suppose a big fish took that bite out of the yacht."

THE SKIPPER did not hear Peter's words. He had gone overside. His tight oxygen mask was in place. All of the superstructure cabins aft had been smashed. The Skipper worked into the jammed wreckage.

The mutilated bodies of two sailors were pierced by jagged timbers. One other man was pinned in the small cabin he had occupied. Cap felt his way about the wreckage.

He failed to find the body of Jammer Cartnel. But he got into a small cabin where baggage and some sogged clothing proved this had been occupied by the late Royer Stannus's political manager.

In less than two minutes, Cap bobbed up alongside his small boat. He climbed

in and called out to the irate, gray-eyed yacht commander.

"You're sure Jammer Cartnel stayed in his bunk? He wasn't trapped in his cabin! You know you've been torpedoed?"

"Damn you!" roared the yacht captain. "I'll bet you'd know! That man on watch said a big fish! That'd be it, a torpedo! Maybe they're shootin' them from airplanes now! Then we're all crazy!"

Already launches were putting out from shore. The hour was in the first morning watch after midnight.

"We've no time to waste here," said Cap to Peter and Spike. "Bend away, boys, and make for the sea channel. There's nothing we can do, and I've an idea Jammer Cartnel didn't die in this one."

The sailors laid weight on the oars. The *Whirlwind's* small boat danced away.

"Hey, you slimy scut!" shouted the yacht captain. "You ain't leavin' us here!"

The fore part of the broken yacht was settling. Cap eyed the launch lights coming out.

"You'll be picked off, captain!" he sang out. "We've other important business! You can tell the police a big fish got you! It was a torpedo, and it didn't come from a plane!"

The yacht commander indigoed the night air with oaths.

"I'll tell 'em you're scuttlin' murderers!" he threatened. "What did you do with that fellow Dude Stavano? Cartnel said he was spending the night with you!"

The Skipper made no reply. The small boat was losing the wrecked yacht. Cap ordered its course across shoal water to cut ahead of the old *Whirlwind*. The ship's riding lights were moving at about a five-knot speed toward the ship channel.

"YOU heard that, Peter," stated The Skipper. "Jammer Cartnel told the yacht captain Stavano was spending the night with us. What do you make of that?"

Peter eyed Cap with his solid black eyes.

"I intended telling you, Cap, that Jammer Cartnel dumped the second drink I plugged for him. So what do you make of that?"

"It would seem," stated Cap in a musing tone, "that Jammer Cartnel has considerable more on the ball than I had suspected. He then was aware we were holding Dude Stavano, and he left him there."

"By the great hornspoon!" spilled Spike Briggs. "You think, Cap, Cartnell had something to do with this explosion?"

"It is apparent he did not die, nor was he knocked out and asleep in his cabin when the blast struck. A torpedo might have been launched from any apparently ordinary cruiser launch or some other disguised vessel. That was the big fish the sailor saw, but I'll venture to say no one knew where Jammer Cartnel was at that moment."

The small boat was surging along almost at average launch speed on the hearty stroke of the *Whirlwind* sailors. The wrecked yacht had been left by some two hundred yards or more when shouting broke out.

Doubtless the enraged yacht captain was informing the first arrivals he believed the *Whirlwind* men to be responsible for the explosion. He would be informing them of the missing Dude Stavano. Also, it would be quickly discovered the *Whirlwind* had weighed anchor.

Launch lights danced toward the small boat. The Skipper smiled in the darkness, sighted from the building lights of Miami and those on the long causeway across the bay, and changed the boat's course.

The small craft scraped over a long shoal bar. Cap knew that bay better than the men who had dug its channels. The course he had laid compelled the launches to take a circuitous route of more than two miles to escape grounding.

"Cap," said Peter Doom, "I'm beginning to get at this. Jammer Cartnel probably is the buzzard directing this whole murder racket. It shows all over the surface. He didn't let me drug him, but he pretended he had."

"Only little fish, the bait, show on the surface, Peter," said The Skipper quietly. "The big ones stay deep down, and sometimes they don't mind eating the little ones on top. You may have noticed that a few of those in this murder game have themselves been made to walk the plank."

"Hell!" sputtered Peter. "Sometimes I can't follow you, Cap!"

This was hardly amazing. A much more astute brain than that of Peter Doom often would have been lost in the maze of The Skipper's reasoning.

The small boat made the sea channel just inside the breakwater. The white break of Atlantic surface was showing in the darkness. The boat was davited easily with the *Whirlwind* maintaining her slow way.

Cap Fury did not linger on deck. He whipped down into the cabin. The cocky harbor official was foaming. Two sailors were guarding him. Hurricane Dan was topside directing the ship through the narrow ship channel.

THE SKIPPER wasted no words. He propelled the harbor man into a cabin.

"You're a good citizen only doing your duty as you see it," stated Cap. "But I've no time to argue fine points. We are bound on a mission that may be for the salvation of thousands. You're only one man. Still, I don't want to treat you roughly."

The harbor official was not treated roughly. He simply went to sleep suddenly.

The ship channel from Biscayne Bay is less than one hundred and fifty yards in breadth. Now that clearance was narrowed by the movement of an incoming passenger liner from New York. The *Whirlwind* passed this vessel with the usual signal whistles.

The breakwater passage to the open Atlantic lay perhaps half a mile ahead. This was where the channel opened across the island on which the city of Miami Beach is located.

A string of lights showed squarely across the passage. The sharp, commanding siren of a harbor cutter broke in upon the passing signal whistles. A searchlight beam bored its way from the darkness. It lighted the disreputable three hundred feet of the rusty *Whirlwind*.

That cutter and another boat were laid squarely across the tramp tanker's bow. A voice of authority megaphoned.

"Heave to there! No ship clears the bay without special orders! We're speaking to the captain!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" bellowed a voice. "You're addressin' him! I'm the master here!"

This was no other than the huge Hurricane Dan. He loomed suddenly in a *Whirlwind* bridge light beside the port rail. His uniform bore the insignia of the shipmaster.

"Then you can't leave the harbor!" shouted the commander of the cutter. "You can't put about in this passage, but we'll accompany you outside and escort you back! Didn't you get the order passed to all ships?"

"To be sure, sir!" shouted Hurricane Dan. "I got the order, but I've been given special authority! An' here's the assistant harbor master right here to tell you so!"

A gilt-braided figure stepped from the shadows. No doubt the cutter men

knew the second harbor official. It was his face that looked down at them.

"That's right!" he called out. It was the harbor official's voice. "The *Whirlwind* has been given special clearance! I'm seeing the ship out, and I'll be bringing the papers back to you in my launch in a few minutes!"

The cutter commander saw the small official launch in tow alongside. He must have been familiar with the second harbor master's appearance and tone.

"That's all right then!" he assented. "We'll be picking you up soon!"

THE old *Whirlwind* nosed into the slapping swell of the open sea. Two minutes afterward, Cap Fury had restored the uniform of the harbor official asleep in his cabin. A release of nerve pressure awakened that cocky individual. He blinked at The Skipper.

"You can't hold me here!" he shouted immediately. "If you want to escape jail, you'll put about!"

The official did not even realize he had been unconscious, or that many minutes had passed. Nor did he know Cap Fury had used his uniform, his face and his voice.

When he was brought topside, the official gasped. The tramp ship was dipping to the slow outside roll of the sea. The lights blinking on the channel breakwater indicated the ship was some half mile offshore.

"Hope you've had a pleasant visit," said Cap, with a twinkle in his blue eyes. "You are at liberty to go. By the way, your launch is ready, and the commander of a cutter back there is picking you up to examine our special clearance papers."

The cocky official's mouth fell open. His chest deflated. He sputtered vague oaths as Spike Briggs saw him into his launch. The harbor boat was cast adrift, its motor running.

"I'll get you—by damn, I'll get you!" yelled the official, shaking his fist. "Our cutter will overhaul this stinking hulk before you can lose the channel lights!"

The motor of the harbor launch roared it away. The bewildered assistant harbor master was convinced the overhauling of the *Whirlwind* would be simple enough. Why, the clanking old coffee mill they called an engine couldn't turn up more than nine or ten knots, about twelve miles an hour.

The harbor cutter was good for thirty knots. By gravy! He would teach this smart Captain Fury what was what.

The harbor launch made its half mile to the channel. Within five minutes, the swift cutter was streaking through the lifting swells. Before it could reach it, the cutter commander figured the old *Whirlwind* might possibly sail a mile or two.

Yet when he had combed the radius of the sea for eight to ten miles, losing an hour, the commander and the harbor official could only swear helplessly. The *Whirlwind* had vanished as completely as if it had been sunk.

For The Skipper had given a quick order. In the *Whirlwind* wheelhouse, Spike Briggs had pressed a lever, A shining panel of instruments had swung into view. Before this came, there had been only the ordinary ship navigation instruments.

Now a strange, hissing power was released. The old engine became silent. From deep combustion chambers flowed a smooth explosive power. It sent twin white streaks foaming behind the *Whirlwind*.

The rusty tanker gathered speed. With the wheel set and the course laid eastward toward the Bahamas, the *Whirlwind* was converted into a flying, black phantom ship.

She was moving at nearly one hundred miles an hour. The ship was fifty miles offshore, before The Skipper judged it wise to cut this speed for the shoaled-in channel near the islands.

Cap had charted a course which

should bring the vessel sometime during the coming day into the vicinity of Longitude 77 east, and Latitude 24 north.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BREATHLESS DEATH.

HAD Bumps McCarthy been informed the old *Whirlwind* was booming along toward Longitude 77 east, Latitude 24 north, his depressed spirit might have arisen. But the red-headed cameraman had no means of knowing even that he was in the vicinity of that longitude and latitude.

The points by which navigators set their course meant little to Bumps. Of his passage to this spot, the cameraman knew nothing. For before he had regained consciousness, after having been knocked out by the short, fat man who had broken the Miami jail for Tarna Rodens, a hypodermic had been used to lengthen Bumps's slumber.

He was awake now; keenly, painfully, confusedly awake. And he knew his sleep had been long. He had been taken prisoner during the early hours of the night. Now the sun had almost completed its daily orbit and was dropping like a red ball into the ocean.

Bumps was sure he had not been brought to this place on the queer craft in which he was now imprisoned. The cameraman's wrists were secured behind his back. His legs were firmly bound. He was sitting propped up against a wall.

All round him arose time-blackened timbers that he guessed once had been the hull of a ship. Much of the ship's hull had been rotted away. But the skeleton and some old bulkheaded chambers remained intact. Bumps saw he was in one of these.

Through the broken hull, he could see across a sandy strip of beach to the open sea. Beyond that the sun was about to set. So this might be the next day, or the day after. Bumps's head felt as if it had been split and badly pushed back together.

He judged he had been brought to an island. The beach seemed to terminate suddenly at its two ends. Outside, the sea was calm; and it had the grayness of shallow water.

East, west and south of lower Florida are thousands of islands. Bumps reflected this might be any of them. Also, he saw the wrecked ship hull was of an ancient pattern. In fact, this was the half-buried hulk of a ship once sailed by a pirate known as Blackbeard.

The island was one of a long string of hundreds of cays in the outer Bahamas. This wrecked pirate ship lay on a cay northward from Exuma Island.

Bumps's reflection was broken in upon. A husky, low voice spoke. The cameraman twisted his head. Near him sat the golden-brown girl. She was bound in a similar fashion to himself. That did not make much sense.

But it did confirm a feeling Bumps had had the night before. Tarna Rodens had been snatched from the Miami jail. Yet Bumps had sensed she had been neither a party to that escape nor to the choking death that had been spread about.

"You are all right?" breathed the girl. "I'm glad. I was so afraid."

"You can call it all right," grunted Bumps, twisting against the numbing cords about him. "Where are we? How did we come here? What——"

"Please—I don't know much about it," interrupted Tarna Rodens. "They gave you a hypo, then they did the same for me. But we were brought here in a——"

IT sounded as if the words had been slapped from the girl's lips. This had been done. It was a soft, pudgy hand that bruised the girl's lips. Then the short, fat man of the jail escape stepped from behind the blackened timbers beside her.

"Sorry, Miss Rodens, but you talk too much," spoke that almost gentle voice. "I thought you would be coming out of it. You and our friend here. But from now on, I'll do all the talking necessary."

Bumps spat an oath at the fat man.

"I like spunk, my friend," said the fat man, blinking his mild, pale eyes. "But we'll have to temper it. As soon as you've had refreshments, we have work to be done while there is light."

He walked over and lifted Bumps's movie camera. It was intact. The fat man handled it carefully.

"All right, boys, bring along the chow!" he called out.

Half a dozen men entered the old wreck. Bumps read every face. All had the fixed, ruthless smiles of killers. One man brought a steaming tray and some drinks. Bumps ate, because he felt he should. His hands were free, but his legs were not.

The meat was good. It was broiled iguana, but Bumps did not know that. Out here the islanders called it Bahama chicken.

The man addressed the fat man as "Preacher." It had an odd, ironical sound. But it fitted. Bumps saw that. The mild killer had all the manners of some preacher.

As Bumps finished eating, Preacher ordered his legs freed.

"Don't make any mistake, my friend," he cautioned. "You may stay alive some time if you keep your head. Any man here would knock you off if you're foolish. There are only two fishing schooners, and you couldn't take them. And out there—barracuda, sharks—— Well?"

Bumps wanted to know then what this was all about?

"Just this," said Preacher, smiling gently. "You are to take some pictures. They will be a sensation. They are to be taken ashore, and they will appear on some news screens. When they do, a man known as Governor Marbleday and several hundred thousand citizens will be sure all this is no bluff."

"Pictures? Of what?" demanded Bumps.

"Death, my friend. Only death—but it will be moving. Oh, only of some natives out here who are better off dead, anyway. They have to grub sponges out of the mud for a living. We are doing them a favor."

"Don't do it—don't you do it!" suddenly cried the girl. "It is more murder! Preacher, if that's what they call you, take me to the boss! You hear!"

"I'll see you scorched in hell before I make a shot like that!" raged Bumps.

His red-headed temper boiled over. He made a lurch toward the Preacher. But his legs were numb, and he started falling. One of the near-by men laughed nastily and helped him to the ground with a clip under the butt of his ear.

"Perhaps you'll see the boss—all in good time," purred the Preacher, speaking to the golden-brown girl. "But in the meantime, the boss has other ideas for you. A nice, little ride."

BUMPS sat up dizzily.

"I'll bust all hell out of that camera when I get my hands on it!" he gritted. "So that's the set-up. Some kind of blackmail of this Governor Marbleday, huh? And you want me to shoot a murder film! I'm not having any of it, thank you, not if you kill me!"

The Preacher smiled patiently. Tarna Rodens was standing. Her slim figure was trembling in her thin, revealing dress. Bumps saw the shifting eyes of the Preacher's men gloating upon her.

"Why, my friend, we couldn't kill you," the Preacher purred. "You're too valuable. Miss Rodens is a sweet, little person, now isn't she?"

"Too sweet to be mentioned by that oily devil's tongue of yours!" snapped Bumps.

"Even if she may have done a bit of

murder on her own account," suggested the Preacher.

"Oh!" cried the girl. "Murder? I didn't—it was——"

Preacher's hand suddenly sank into the soft flesh of the girl's shoulder. His fingers may have been pudgy, but they were cruel. His thumb gouged into her armpit. Tarna Rodens gave a gasping little scream.

The Preacher snapped out an order. He said, "The masks!"

Two of the men brought hoodlike affairs. Bumps was told he could don one of these and fasten it tightly if he wanted to live. His nerves screaming in sympathy with the golden-brown girl, Bumps wanted very much to live—to live long enough to get that Preacher's fat neck between his two hands.

The Preacher put the camera into his hands.

He said, "Miss Rodens has made a mistake. The boss does not want to see her. You be careful of that camera, or I shall give my boys a chance to convince Miss Rodens she must behave."

Looking into the avid eyes of the Preacher's boys, Bumps took the camera as if it were very fragile. The Preacher said, "Come along," and they went from the wreck down the strip of beach.

Bumps saw then that there was an unusually deep channel leading to a small wharf. Two fishing schooners were tied there. They had old, slow-kicking engines. Bumps looked about.

It was apparent they had not been brought to this ocean island on either of these vessels. Directed by the Preacher, they went aboard. Then Bumps saw three men had stayed with the girl on the beach.

"I'm not taking any pictures!" Bumps announced. "You can force me just so far!"

The hoodlike mask muffled his voice. The Preacher and all of the others also were masked. One of the hoods now concealed the lovely features of the golden-brown girl. Except for this group, there was now no other life apparent.

BUMPS saw that the island on which the pirate ship lay was small. No more than half a mile long, much less in width. Thick mangroves concealed its interior. One fishing schooner, with Bumps, the Preacher and three other men, moved out along the channel.

In Bumps's mind was the conjecture as to how this picture of murder was to be produced.

Through the glass eyes of his mask, he saw Tarna Rodens being led along the narrow beach. Then she was taken into the concealment of a strip of mangroves. Bumps's veins suddenly burned.

He repeated he was not taking any pictures. The Preacher had a smile in his voice behind the mask.

"Miss Rodens will appear presently," he said. "No harm will have come to her. But from the time you see her again, whether she lives or dies, or only lives with some horrors to remember is all up to you, my friend. You may set up your camera."

All this was fantastic. Bumps swept his gaze around the gray expanse of calm sea. The fishing schooner was chugging toward the fan-tailed end of the sandy cay. Still there was no other sign of life on the water or on the land.

Bumps strained his eyes, trying to see through those mangrove bushes. The golden-brown girl was in the hands of those cold killers, with all her loveliness, and all their ruthlessness. Mobsters they appeared to be, of the most virulent type.

It was maddening. Not even a breeze whispered over the mangroves. The middle of the island was hidden. The sun was slipping down, becoming a widening ball of fire. Soon it would dip into the sea, then there would be darkness.

Suddenly, the old motor of the fish-

ing schooner ceased beating. The little vessel glided as if it were to be grounded on one of the cay's fan-tail bars. Then another boat popped into view.

Between the fantails at the island end was a broad lagoon, half circled by a white coral reef and sand. The other boat lay in the lagoon. It was a squat, flat lugger, with a projecting cathead platform.

Bumps counted eleven men on the deck and platform of the lugger. They were busily engaged hauling up lines to which sponge drags were attached. Masses of the take were piled on the deck. Some of the men were busy stowing this into the hold.

Lines were down in the lagoon. Bumps saw one man tending the lines and an air pump. That meant a diver was on the bottom. The scene was peaceful. These spongers were natives, white men, but burned almost black over their bared upper bodies.

One man was singing. Apparently, their sponge haul was pleasing. The lugger crew joined in a swinging chorus. The Preacher touched Bumps's arm, and his voice crackled.

"Get that box ready, before we're spotted!"

Bumps had not set up his camera. His eyes shifted to the mangroves where the golden-brown girl had been taken. His ears had been keened for a scream, a cry. And in spite of the handicap of numbers, he was figuring his chances of starting something.

Though they could observe the lugger crew, the Preacher's boat had not yet been spotted.

"I'm not setting up until I know——"

Bumps bit off his own words. What was that coming from a spot on the inner shore line of the lagoon?

THE men who were with Tarna Rodens stepped into view. Their masks gave them the appearance of terrible monsters. The thing that Bumps saw was the golden-brown girl, though he was several seconds identifying her half-stripped body.

For there was a real monster crawling from the mangroves. It looked like a great, round tub with the bobbing head of some scaly serpent. It was an immense loggerhead turtle—one of the Bahamas' loggerheads that sometimes attain a size of seven hundred pounds.

This hard-shelled monster was little less than that. Its thick leg flippers propelled it toward the water of the lagoon. The lovely curving limbs of the girl were now bare. Only her flimsy undergarments remained as a cover. Her arms were spread. Bumps sucked in his breath. It came out with hissing oaths.

The Preacher had expected this reaction. Two of his men fastened firm grips on his arms.

The girl's wrists were bound with cords under the shell of the great loggerhead turtle, attached to the forward flippers. Cords wrapped the gleaming white legs. These were drawn to the turtle's rear flippers.

The loggerhead entered the water of the lagoon. Bumps could not detect this, but the great turtle's head had been pierced at the beaklike mouth and bridled upward to a fastening on its shell. This would prevent it from diving.

Expert swimmers of the Bahamas sometimes ride the big loggerheads. They do this by diving, seizing the turtles, then keeping them on the surface by straining back on the forward edge of the shells. It is a highly dangerous pastime. Sometimes the turtle gets his head pulled in, taking a hand with it.

Then the loggerhead goes down, taking the rider with him.

Bumps had no thought for the fine points of loggerhead riding. The helpless Tarna Rodens was being carried out into the lagoon. The cameraman could see every revealed curve of her lithe body. She was looking at the sky.

If the girl screamed, it could not be heard. For the hoodlike mask still inclosed her face. Bumps knew the mask held oxygen. As yet, he had not even attempted to guess the purpose of this.

"You will make ready," suggested the Preacher at his elbow. "See, our friends on the lugger are looking. If that turtle gets beyond a hundred yards from shore, nothing can save Miss Rodens's most beautiful legs from the barracudas. They are thick just inside that outer reef."

Bumps was stricken with numb horror. Several times he had seen what the barracudas, the little tigers of these waters, could do. The fierce fish would attack any living thing. They loved flesh under white skin.

If that turtle swam out to the reef! And the turtle was swimming, loggily, but steadily, pointing its bridled beak for the open sea. The weight of the girl was half submerged. Bumps saw her limbs writhing.

The turtle could not dive. Even that death might have been quicker, more merciful. But the slim legs of the girl trailed under the water.

THE man at the diving rig on the lugger started up. He pointed and shouted. The other ten men dropped their work. They stared with fascination at the swimming turtle, at the white body of the girl on its back.

They were island natives, and superstitious. They were scared. But one fellow shouted and threw himself toward a small boat drifting at the lugger's stern. He was untying the rope when there came the biting spat of a gun.

One of the men by the mangroves, who had launched the girl on her incredible ride, had fired. The poor fellow at the lugger's stern fell back upon the deck. He lay there, kicking spasmodically.

Behind Bumps, the Preacher had a pistol in his hand. He lifted it and shot three times, quickly spaced explosions. Bumps heard three other shots. These came from behind the mangroves in the middle of the little island, where Bumps had seen no one moving.

Tarna Rodens apparently was fighting to loosen herself from the cruel cords. She got one wrist free. Her white arm moved, attempting to reach her other wrist. The turtle's back tilted. The girl's face went under.

Bumps heard himself saying, "Yes—oh, hell! Yes! What must I take? Quick! Get the girl!"

The Preacher laugh tauntingly.

"I thought, my friend, you would get it. That lugger now, you see they are getting up the hook. They have the engine running. They see us. One man is hauling up the diver. Get on them with the camera. Start grinding before I shoot again."

Bumps saw the golden-brown girl's head come above the surface. The bridled turtle could not submerge. Bumps hoped the oxygen mask had prevented the girl from strangling. Without sense of feeling, or thinking, he had the movie camera focused on the lugger crew.

The native spongers were plainly terrified. Two men were hauling at the diver's lines. But they were so in haste, already the lugger was beginning to move slowly toward the lagoon outlet in the coral reef.

Behind Bumps, the Preacher's gun exploded three more shots. This time there were no answering shots to the signal. The men by the mangroves on the shore were watching the lugger's crew.

Bumps had them in his camera. Automatically, he had set the sound track working. The grinding of the lugger's motor was being recorded. The spongers were yelling. If this was to be murder, in what manner would it come?

Not that Bumps was any longer considering this. All he now had in mind was the hope all would be over before that loggerhead decided to make directly for the coral reef.

The lugger had only a few yards to go to reach the outlet. Two men still hauled on the diver's lines. That fellow was taking another kind of a ride, under the surface.

Then death struck. For the second time, that Old Sure-shot camera recorded grim, silent murder. The death came from nowhere that was apparent. This time, there was no added living figure who might be transmitting the fatal stroke.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE MAN IN THE SEA.

SILENT, breathless, invisible death it was. The motor of the sponging lugger throbbed on. The pulses of the lugger crew ceased to beat.

One man had been killed by a bullet. Ten others pushed their hands into space before them, as if they could seize from the air something to lessen the terrible constriction of their lungs.

Bumps's right hand moved around its little circle. He was sick. He saw the dying men on the lugger only subconsciously. His gaze was centered upon the loggerhead turtle, upon the trailing white legs of the girl.

That turtle now was headed for the opening in the reef. Its monstrous head was still upheld. Had Bumps seen the swirl of fish in the lagoon near the loggerhead?

The Preacher touched his arm. Bumps had not even known the lugger already was moving out of range of his camera. For Tarna Rodens had jerked her body convulsively, as if something had slashed at the white skin of her legs.

And all of the men on the lugger were lying down. They were lying in grotesque positions. Their arms were rigid. Perhaps the camera eye would record that their mouths were open.

The lugger, without a steersman, went through the lagoon outlet.

"Fine!" said the Preacher. "The farther it goes, the better! You have done well, my friend! Now when that little movie is flashed upon the screen, Governor Marbleday and his crowd will know the boss means business!"

"Damn you! Oh, damn you!" shouted Bumps. "Get that girl! Get her, I say, or I'll——"

A hard fist crashed into his teeth. Bumps went down, and the camera pitched toward the schooner deck. Another man caught it neatly before it hit.

Blood oozed from Bumps's split lips. He got to his hands and knees, staring, staring out over the lagoon. For many seconds, there was only red mist in his eyes. Red mist, and that damnable expanse of cruel, calm water.

Where was the great loggerhead? Had the monster pulled its head free and dived at last?. Or, worse, had slashing barracudas seized the girl's limbs, pulled her under with the turtle?

The Preacher lifted his pistol and fired again three times. Three shots replied to the signal from the middle of the darkening cay. For the semi-tropical sun had dipped into its evening bath that looked like flowing blood across the horizon.

The sponging lugger with its dead crew sailed directly into the pathway of the sinking sun. Behind it trailed the lines of the diver still under the surface. Could he have escaped the grisly fate that had so swiftly overtaken his companions?

Bumps had no thought for that. He crawled to the rail of the little fishing schooner. In the darkening lagoon, a small boat was being rowed out. Still Bumps could see neither the turtle nor the white body of the girl.

BUMPS could never have told for how long an interval he waited. Crouched there like an animal without sense or reason, on the filthy deck of the fishing schooner, he strained his eyes and his ears for some sound of hope from the lagoon.

Then he heard a whimpering, low cry; a husky voice sobbing. Ahead of the small boat in the lagoon was a great swirling of the water. The released loggerhead turtle was diving, freed of its lovely rider.

Bumps then saw Tarna Rodens had been taken into the small boat. A man laughed harshly. The Preacher was pulling off his mask.

Darkness came swiftly over the low, sandy cay. From the middle of the island, lights leaped out. Tarna Rodens was brought ashore and her clinging, flimsy dress was restored.

Bumps, free of his mask, conducted into the hull of the ancient Blackbeard pirate ship, saw there were fixed lines of horror in the face of the golden-brown girl. Lines that would remain there for life.

Except for her experience, the girl seemed to have been unharmed. These boys commanded by Preacher were apparently under the sway of powerful discipline. Otherwise, Bumps knew Tarna would have had moments to remember all the rest of her life.

Now they were conducted to a strange, bulkheaded compartment of the pirate wreck. This was a tightly closed chamber with airtight doors. Bumps and the girl were left unbound. They were served with a late supper.

The Preacher said little. From an adjoining room, Bumps could detect the murmuring of a radio. The Preacher went in there. When he returned, his mild smile was smirking.

"You'll have one more job to perform, my friend," he told Bumps. "To-morrow, or the next day, we intend to have the filming of a whole island. It will prove to persons in State and national authority what can happen to any city, any section of the population. After that, we shall have no further use for you. We will repay you with your freedom."

Bumps set his teeth and said nothing. Unless there were some means of drawing Cap Fury and the *Whirlwind* into this, he would take the picture of an island. He had no means of preventing this ghastly, mysterious slaughter.

He did not intend to have the torture of Tarna Rodens repeated. His heart sank as he glanced at the dulled eyes of the girl. Or were they so dull as they seemed? Behind her apparent stupor, there must have been intention. It glowed in a spark deep in those dulled eyes.

BUMPS, like The Skipper, could read lips. Tarna's lips were moving silently.

"I shall kill him—I shall live to kill him——"

This was being whispered over and over. Whom did she mean, was Bumps's thought. Perhaps this Preacher-torturer? But Bumps did not think so.

The Preacher was under orders from an outside source. Bumps was convinced this came over that radio in the adjoining compartment, for he had announced the intention to have a film of island murder after being in there.

The Preacher and his men went out; the doors closed. Before he left, the Preacher spoke with warning.

"You are left free to move about, my friend. These doors are unlocked. But you have no masks. At timed intervals the breathless death will spread over this cay. That is the order of the Choker, the boss. This room is automatically supplied with oxygen. Venture outside, and death may strike you at any second. May your dreams be pleasant."

So that was it. In some manner, this terrible murder force could be released

and spread. Oxygen then was protection against it. Of what the force might be, Bumps had no inkling.

Then the cameraman got a surprise. Tarna Rodens's stupor vanished. Her golden-brown eyes glowed upon Bumps.

"Soon we must take a chance," she said. "They do not intend you shall leave alive. They only want to use you. There is another prisoner just back of this wall where I am sitting. I can hear him moving, breathing. We must get into the radio room."

"Sweet hell!" groaned Bumps. "What chance could we have to get away? We don't even know what causes these murders. And only possession of masks would enable us to chance getting away. We have no weapons."

The girl smiled, terribly. Her lovely mouth was drawn into downward lines of intense hate.

"I know who is back of all this, but I shall not tell you," she said. "That murder force, the breathless death comes from a foul, black circle in the middle of this island. I saw it with lights around it after I came ashore. It is like a burned ring in the sand, a hundred feet across. There is some sort of a small tower at one side. It has pipes like ventilators."

WHAT could be the killing force that had spread its death around all of the island? Plainly, it penetrated over the sea, for the men on the sponge lugger had been in the lagoon.

Just then the girl held up her hand.

"I can hear the man in the other room swearing. He is moving. It sounds as if he is attempting to find a way out."

Bumps moved close to the wall of blackened timbers. A man was in there. He scraped something along the wall. Thin, muffled words came through.

"Can you hear me in there?"

Bumps rapped the wall, and said: "Who are you?"

"Never mind that," whispered the voice. "I am next to that radio room. I have a tight, thick window through which I saw all that happened to you a while ago. Watch and listen. If you hear any one coming, hit the wall three times. I'm making a try to get at that radio."

"Yes! Yes!" said Bumps excitedly. "And then what?"

Bumps's breath was almost snatched away.

"If I make it, I'm calling Captain Fury of the *Whirlwind!*"

"Sweet hell! Who are you?" shouted Bumps.

The man did not reply. He was working again at some possible means of exit from his prison. Bumps knew he could not be any man from the *Whirlwind,* or he would have so informed him. Then who was this mystery prisoner who was trying to make stealthy radio communication? And why had he named Captain Fury as his chief hope?

"Captain Fury?" exclaimed Tarna Rodens. "He was the man in that hospital. He is brave, but he would have no chance against the fiendish brain directing this vast murder plot."

"No?" grunted Bumps. "That's what you think! If our invisible friend contacts the *Whirlwind* Skipper, you'll find out! I'd give something to know who he is, or if perhaps we are being tricked!"

Again the golden-brown girl handed Bumps a surprise.

"I know who he is," she stated quietly. "I'll not tell you now. But if he is detected, he will die. Then I may divulge the truth."

Bumps said, "You seem to know a great deal. You may be surprised to learn that I like you a lot, and still I'm not sure I should trust you too much."

"I'm not interested in either you liking me or trusting me," the girl said quietly. "We had better watch the doors."

The unseen prisoner was still attempt-

ing to get into the radio room. Presently, the sounds ceased. Bumps could only hope the mysterious man had succeeded. If he could only contact Cap Fury!"

IT now lacked something of midnight, and in the air and on the sea strange events were moving to convey to The Skipper much vital information—knowledge that might prevent The Skipper and all of his crew from sailing straight into annihilation.

On the sea was the sponging lugger that had been in the lagoon. The chugging engine of the dead islanders was faithful. With no steersman at the wheel, the lugger had moved eccentrically to the southward and westward from the cay of the breathless death.

At near midnight, the ghostly little ship with its crew of dead, whose faces had turned black, was in the vicinity of Latitude 24. It had verged over on that invisible line toward Longitude 77.

This was the latitude and longitude forced from the lips of Dude Stavano before he had died at the whipping post of the *Whirlwind*.

The *Whirlwind* itself was crossing Latitude 24. The Skipper was holding a course close to Longitude 77. Somewhere north and east of the convergence of these hemispheric lines lay the origin of the breathless death. Or so Cap Fury had been convinced by Dude Stavano's words.

Yet The Skipper knew there lay a wide space of sea, several hundred square miles in the vague "east" and "north" of these lines. He lacked the exact number of points. But he was aware that a string of many sandy, uninhabited cays stretched along the eastward side of this space.

The *Whirlwind* was being held at its ordinary engine speed. Here were many channels, many dangerous shoals—no free ocean space for employing the fast power of the tanker. The Skipper was only feeling his way through the night, for all of the day had given no hint of what he might be seeking.

So the drifting sponge lugger on its rudderless power, and the *Whirlwind* was rapidly converging upon the same point in the open sea.

No lugger had ever carried a more ghastly crew. Nor had any vessel ever had a stranger tow.

The lines of the diver, who had been on the bottom of the lagoon when death had struck, were still attached. And the man at the end of these lines was alive. At a plugging eight or ten knots an hour, he was being drawn through the water in the small boat.

He was young, this diver. Yet in the past few hours, lines of age had come to his face. Whipped through the water as the lugger had left the lagoon with its crew of dead, nevertheless the man was on short lines and his strength was great.

Thus he had overhanded himself on his lines, coming to the surface. He had not, of course, known what had happened. Only the fact that his head was encased in a special diving helmet saved him from being suffocated within a few minutes.

The diver was able, on the surface, to detach this helmet. He was just in time to keep from passing out. Then he had fought his way along the lines to the platform of the moving lugger.

Catching the diver's ladder, the man pulled himself to the deck. Cold terror then gripped him. Eleven men lay dead on the deck. The diver was superstitious. The little vessel was now well at sea. Fear drove him back into the water.

Then he detached the small boat at the stern. In this skiff, he remained in his diving suit. He attached the diving lines to permit the boat to drop farther astern. Thus was he towed behind the lugger that had become a ghastly coffin.

Through the shivering hours, the

young diver remained in the small boat. For a long time, there were no lights on the sea. Then, finally, when his superstitious fear had brought him to the point of preparing to cast loose from the moving lugger, the high lights of a ship came into view.

THIS ship was the *Whirlwind*. Cap Fury was standing with Peter Doom in the wheelhouse. The Skipper's keen eyes picked up a sudden heavy shadow.

"Slow speed, astern, Spike!" he ordered the first mate, who was beside the man at the wheel. "Swing the spots! We are heading for what looks like a derelict!"

When the searchlight leaped out, Spike ejaculated. "Sweet Davy Jones! Derelicts don't move under their own power, Skipper!"

Peter Doom emitted a solemn oath. The vessel the light picked up was moving in wide, varying circles. Its wheel swung free. For a little time, the searchlight missed the diver in the small boat.

The Skipper put his binoculars on the craft.

"Dead men on the decks! We'll pick 'em up, Spike! Peter, Dude Stavano did not lie! Apparently, we are close upon the graveyard of which the sailors are afraid!"

Then Spike shouted. He had seen the diver standing up in the small boat, waving his hands frantically. The *Whirlwind* came alongside, and the Jacob's ladder went down.

Coming clumsily aboard, the native diver collapsed upon the deck.

"Dead! They're all dead! My brother! The others! We thought it had gone! But it has come back! The Bahamas' Choker We should not have gone to the Blackbeard cay!"

The Skipper poured a generous swig of rum down the fellow's throat. The diver gulped into coherency. With choking voice, he told what he knew. His companions had been struck down.

Then Spike called from the lugger that one man had been killed by a bullet.

The Skipper said nothing. He issued immediate instructions to drop the lugger. Hurricane Dan was instructed to change course.

CAP studied a chart for a moment, then he stated the *Whirlwind* could not approach within twenty miles of the murder cay.

"The shoals begin far out," The Skipper stated. "If there is a channel, it's new."

"There is a channel," supplied the islander. "We crossed it as we went out. But there are no markings. It is new. You could not locate it except by day, when the blue water would show."

Daylight was hours away. The Skipper had the *Whirlwind* keeping a slow course. He had out a chart of the islands. The location given by the rescued diver was exact. The murder cay would be at the tip of the string above Exuma Island.

The Skipper came to a decision.

"I'm taking one of the speed boats that will cross the shoals. I believe it best to go alone. Hurricane Dan, you keep the *Whirlwind* on this course until the dogwatch. Stand by for radio communication."

Peter Doom and Spike Briggs were protesting. Then from the air came a mysterious call that changed all of The Skipper's plans.

Rather, there were two calls. They crackled through the speaker connection with the communications room in Cap's cabin. One call was a spoken short wave.

"Captain Fury! Trying to pick up Captain Fury! The Whirlwind! Captain Fury!"

Then, almost immediately, confusing the other call——

"S O S! S O S! Cruiser Seafoam! Cruiser Seafoam! Fire! Fire! Longi-

tude 77 east, Latitude 25 south! Off Highborne Cay! Highborne Cay!"

"Captain Fury! Speaking Captain Fury!"

The other short-wave call mixed in. Then, more confusing, the cruiser in distress switched from its regulation wireless code to a short-wave communication.

In order to separate the calls, to get clearer understanding, The Skipper whipped down to his cabin radio room. There, in a few minutes, he heard an answer to the S O S. And it came from the *Blue Bell,* official yacht of Governor Marbleday!

CHAPTER XIII.

INTO THE DEATH TRAP.

THE SKIPPER was in his communications room. He had closed off all outside sound. Now he disconnected the call wires that would have carried to the loud-speakers in the wheelhouse.

The Skipper's Arctic-blue eyes suddenly held the quality of hard ice. Governor Marbleday, he had believed, was still in Miami. Yet to his ears now came the information that the *Blue Bell,* the governor's official yacht, was only a few miles westward of the *Whirlwind's* position.

Cap thought perhaps Governor Marbleday had been led to suspect the *Whirlwind.* Then the radio informed him the governor had come into this Bahamas region for another purpose. For from the supposed cruiser in distress, called the *Seafoam,* crackled more words.

"We have your reply, Governor Marbleday! We are burning. Impossible to stay afloat longer than an hour! Can you locate us! Watch for fire! Jammer Cartnel, your friend, is aboard!"

The Skipper had been partly listening to the other radio call. The short wave that had been directed for his ears alone. He checked, and knew that it was on a signal band that cleared it from the S O S call to Governor Marbleday.

Cap seldom used profanity. When he did, it was expressive. His short oaths were heard only by himself.

Governor Marbleday himself was replying from his official yacht. He was checking on the position of the burning cruiser near Highborne Cay. He was giving assurance the *Blue Bell* would proceed at full speed.

Cap heard the governor say, *"I had been informed Cartnel was on the Seafoam. Contact was made with me. Let Cartnel speak."*

There was a brief interval of silence on that call. During this, The Skipper replied to the short-wave contact he had made.

"I AM getting your message," he stated. "Remain where you are. Do nothing. Yes, I get it that Bumps McCarthy and Tarna Rodens are also prisoners. But there is another call. It has picked up Governor Marbleday's yacht! It's an S O S, and the governor is heading to assist a cruiser called the *Seafoam."*

The Skipper's own mysterious caller exclaimed vehemently.

"Stop him, Captain Fury! Head off his yacht! It must be a trap! There is no cruiser Seafoam! It's a trick to get the governor into their hands! Probably every man with him will be wiped out by the breathless death! Stop him! It's—it's—the Choker! I'm—they're coming——"

The Skipper's call was abruptly cut off. Now he could hear the supposed burning cruiser talking again.

"We cannot bring Jammer Cartnel to the radio room! He is very ill! You must hurry, governor! We can keep the fire in check a little more than an hour! Give your position!"

The Skipper mentally noted the position of the governor's yacht. In a few

seconds, he had checked this with his own position.

So an incredible murder trap was being laid for Governor Marbleday in the sea of the Bahamas! And he had arrived in this latitude to make contact with Jammer Cartnel, on the supposed *Seafoam.*

Cap's face was a grim mask as he emerged from the radio room.

"By my sacred aunt!" rumbled Peter Doom. "What hit you, Cap?"

Cap's reply was strange.

"I imagine we are about to commit a high crime of the sea, Peter. Possibly it will amount to piracy and seizure. There may be no other way. I am about to abduct a governor of a great State. Perhaps we shall scuttle his official yacht."

"By my soul!" thundered Peter Doom. "Captain, have you become a little bit crazy?"

"There are leanings that way," admitted The Skipper dryly. "The yacht of Governor Marbleday must be headed off. For the present, we cannot use radio contact without it being picked up by those who seem to want the governor for their own purpose."

THE scarred face of Spike Briggs beamed with unholy delight. He had heard The Skipper say they might scuttle a yacht, seize a governor. Spike rubbed his grubby knuckles. Thus far in all of this he had failed in sating his appetite for fighting.

Abruptly, The Skipper's intentions set Peter Doom swearing to himself. For Cap gave an order to change course. He estimated they might intercept Governor Marbleday's yacht in something like fifteen to twenty minutes.

Cap was aware something had happened to the man who had called the *Whirlwind* out of the mysterious night. He had said the "Choker." Then that "they were coming." The Skipper could only hope his informant had managed to escape being detected in the act of calling for help.

And there was much information Cap had not passed along to his companions. For the prisoner who had called him from the cay of the breathless death had touched upon an amazing, a fantastic possibility in connection with the identity of the murderous man called the Choker.

The *Whirlwind* swung on her course. The old tanker was angled to get contact with Governor Marbleday's yacht. In the meantime, Cap seemed to dismiss this whole matter of heading off the yacht.

Leaving an astounded Peter Doom in his cabin, Cap whipped into his movie projection room. He locked the door behind him. In a space of seconds he was studying a picture on the screen. It was the murder film taken by Bumps McCarthy on the Biscayne Bay wharf.

Cap ran the picture twice. He studied all of its details from the moment the pompous, dignified Royer Stannus had stepped from his launch onto the little wharf. He especially slowed the portion where the big-headed eighth man with a handkerchief over his face had appeared and vanished—the eighth man who had been in hiding on the launch. He could have come from no other place.

Among other details, The Skipper noted that even before the brief picture was finished in a rain squall, the face of Royer Stannus, and those of his six murdered companions had turned very black.

Peter Doom scowled heavily as Cap emerged into the outer cabin.

"Do we work together or don't we?" said Peter irritably.

The funereal ex-inspector of police was given to bursts of temper. Sometimes The Skipper took too much into his own hands to please the former copper.

"There are times when one man can get by where two or more would fail,"

said Cap quietly. "It seems we must get to Jammer Cartnel."

"That drunken buzzard!" snapped Peter. "I've known that all the time! Are you still planning to get to that death island alone?"

"An army would choke to death where one man might get by," grinned Cap.

The topside speaking tube whistled. Spike's excited voice said the yacht lights of the Governor Marbleday vessel were showing. Cap issued a quick order, changing to superpower. He was in the wheelhouse before the great tubes started hissing.

THE radio speaker still picked up continuing communication between the governor's yacht and the supposed burning *Seafoam*. The rusty old *Whirlwind* surged over the mile or so of sea with a wall rising ahead of her rushing speed. The old ship must have appeared like some devastating monster leaping out of the night upon the governor's yacht.

Searchlights flared out. The wheelman of the yacht apparently had swung hard over to miss the oncoming ship. From the oil-tank turrets of the *Whirlwind*, other searchlights crossed those from the yacht. They cast blinding brilliance over the sleek, white vessel.

On the foredeck of the yacht, a tall, gray-haired man stood below the wheelhouse. He looked as stiff as a ramrod, as a governor should appear in an emergency. Beside him were two hard-looking men with holstered guns.

It was apparent these men constituted the executive's personal bodyguard. Cap Fury made a swift inspection of the yacht's personnel even before the *Whirlwind* suddenly dropped her speed and swung broadside, keeping pace with the other vessel.

"There might have been customs men aboard," stated The Skipper to Peter Doom. "But we seem to have missed that. The governor's departure from Miami must have been sudden and urgent."

Cap judged now that the spot to which Governor Marbleday was being lured lay about twelve miles to the northward. Undoubtedly, the radio man on the yacht would be telling the supposed *Seafoam* of the appearance of the *Whirlwind*.

In fact, part of the signal call cracked from the *Whirlwind* wheelehouse.

"We may be delayed, Seafoam! A queer old freight ship has come alongside! We don't know how it got here!"

Cap saw that the yacht was making about eighteen knots. His hand gestured. The *Whirlwind* cut eighteen knots. The tanker eased closer to the yacht. The governor's yacht captain, a young and worried man, put a megaphone to his mouth.

"Sheer off, you crazy devils!" he shouted. "What in time do you mean? You're the *Whirlwind*, huh? Let me speak to Captain Fury!"

THE SKIPPER stepped to the rail. The disreputable hulk of the tanker was close to rubbing the slick white paint of the trim yacht.

"Signal for a stop!" megaphoned Cap. "I wish to come on board! Your yacht is in grave danger! You are following a false S O S! There is no cruiser in the Bahamas known as the *Seafoam!*"

Governor Marbleday grabbed the megaphone from his yacht master.

"If you're Captain Fury, we have reason to doubt anything you may say!" he shouted irascibly. "This is a governor's yacht, and on official business! A boat is burning, and we have no time for discussion!"

The Skipper signaled to Spike Briggs and Hurricane Dan.

"This is going to look bad, very bad," said Cap. "But I was afraid that was the attitude the governor would take. Swing out the grapplers."

Even as the high bulk of the *Whirl-*

wind verged over on the white yacht, The Skipper made another try.

"You're mistaken, governor! If you don't hold off, you are taking all of your crew to their deaths!"

To The Skipper's disgust, the yacht radio operator was getting this. And back it came over the radio of the *Whirlwind*. The dumb fellow at the short wave was informing the supposed *Seafoam* of what was being said.

Cap Fury had good reason to desire quick action. The Choker, as he now knew, was not aboard any small cruiser. It was a far different craft from which that S O S signal was being transmitted—a craft that might make short work of a mere twelve miles, having already ascertained the exact position of the governor's yacht.

As Cap firmly believed, that beautiful white yacht, despite all of its officialdom, would be in other hands within an hour unless swift action was taken. And Governor Marbleday had lost his temper.

The chief executive of a great State whose régime was under a menace, whose leading senatorial figure had been ruthlessly murdered, could hardly be blamed for anger, for doubting the truth of what this questionable ship captain was telling him.

And underneath his official dignity, this Governor Marbleday was pretty much of a red-blooded fellow. He stepped close to one of his bodyguards and snatched one of the revolvers from his holster.

"Now, damn you!" he shouted. "This is nothing but a holdup on the high seas! The captain of the *Petrel* informed us you had committed a ruthless murder on your ship! He believes you may be responsible for the blowing up of his yacht! You give an order to take your ship away, or I'll shoot you in your tracks!"

"By all the green hells!" thundered Peter Doom. "There's a governor after my own heart!"

The stocky figure of The Skipper, beside the rail, was only a scanty twenty yards or so from the enraged State official. Governor Marbleday pointed his guard's revolver with a steady hand.

Side by side, the two vastly different ships sailed along.

THE few seconds were tense. Then it hardly seemed The Skipper had moved a hand. But Governor Marbleday was looking into a penetrating ray of light that would have blinded any man.

This light jumped from a projector on the bridge near the wheelhouse. Hurricane Dan was planted beside the ray. Its blinding radiance beat into the eyes of all those close to the governor.

Again Peter Doom was forced to an oath of admiration. This governor was as game as they made them. Though he may have believed death hovered over him, he fired the revolver rapidly. And so direct was his instinctive aim, that bullets slivered off the rail where Cap had been standing.

The Skipper had moved catlike with the flashing on of the light. As the explosions of the governor's gun ceased, he spoke with calm penetration.

"You've done your best, Governor Marbleday! Sorry, but this has to be done! The grapplers, Spike!"

Four queer, cranelike arms shot from opened plates in the upper hull of the *Whirlwind*. They were like long clawing hooks. Their curving points grabbed over the neat, white rail of the governor's yacht, both fore and aft.

Inside the *Whirlwind* sounded the purring of big motors. The trim yacht heeled over, its rail cracking and splintering. All of its carefully applied paint on the starboard side rubbed into the black rust of the *Whirlwind's* plates.

The two vessels rode for half a minute, tightly grappled together.

"Under cover! Grease the decks,

Hurricane Dan! Shoot the works from number thirteen!"

At The Skipper's barked order, every man of his crew vanished as if by magic from visible positions. Cap pushed Peter Doom behind the turretlike top of one of the smelly, old oil tanks.

Still the piercing ray blinded the confused crew on the foredeck of the yacht. Emulating their boss, the governor's guards cut loose with their revolvers. The Skipper saw then that the yacht carried a mounted rapid-fire gun.

This formidable weapon jumped into view. The youthful captain of the yacht was preparing to do his bit. Then, half blinded, and seeing no human target, the yacht captain cut loose with the machine gun at the *Whirlwind* wheelhouse.

Bullets drummed into the glass. The sailor at the wheel, and Spike Briggs beside him, merely ducked as the glass crashed. Below the weather windows, the wheelhouse was sheathed with armor.

THE SKIPPER spoke again.

"Might as well call it off, governor! Your bottom's going out! We have no desire to injure any one! But when we loosen the hooks, your yacht's going down fast! So start coming over the rails!"

"I'll be damned if I'll permit any pirate captain to give me orders!" shouted Governor Marbleday. "If you sink us, I'll go with the yacht! Now I know —you're the murdering Choker! Stand back, every one!"

In the wheelhouse, Spike had received the order to shoot the works from No. 13. That wise chief officer had held his hand on a lever, taking The Skipper at his word, but waiting until he was sure the vessels were grinding well together.

Spike moved the lever. Between the *Whirlwind* and the white yacht, plates opened at the Plimsoll mark. At this blank range, the black snout of a long, slim gun ran out. Its nose smashed into the yacht's hull, it was so close when a pointed projectile went through on an explosive burst of flame.

It was well then that all of the personnel of the governor's yacht were on deck or in the upper superstructure. Deep down, under the water line, sounded a rumbling explosion. Both vessels staggered from the recoil.

The full drive of the explosive force was downward. This was the first time Cap Fury had used this remarkable weapon. It had been devised for just such an emergency. Not a single man on the yacht was touched, for all of the upper hull remained intact.

The *Whirlwind's* forward grappling arms let go. Immediately, the bow of the white yacht dipped. All of the forward bottom had been ripped out. The water rushed in, flooding toward the engine room amidships.

Governor Marbleday's figure was heroic. He stood, as a captain might, ready to keep his word. The young yacht commander let go the rapid-fire gun and stood beside him.

But as the vessels were separating, and the yacht's riven plates swallowed more sea, an amazing thing happened. Every light on the *Whirlwind* blinked out. The searchlights of the yacht were too close, lacked beam spread enough to be effective.

Through the resultant shadows, The Skipper moved with the agility of a jungle animal. Possibly none saw when he leaped from one rail to another.

A sailor of the yacht crew was the first in his path. Cap removed him with a snapping blow. One of the governor's guards yelled. He was swinging a revolver around. This fellow had not until this moment found a target.

He was here to defend the governor. He fired directly into the flying body of Cap, or he thought he had. The Skipper's movement was too fast for the eye to follow. At the instant the guard's

finger was tightening, the toe of a great sea boot arose.

Then the guard stood holding a cracked wrist. His smoking revolver flew high in the air. The Skipper landed between Governor Marbleday and the young yacht captain.

Cap judged his action shrewdly. He was convinced the temper of Governor Marbleday was such he would have taken a bullet rather than yield on his own account. Cap whirled the youthful yacht commander before him.

From Cap's sleeve had whipped his automatic. It was held openly pressed into the yacht captain's spine.

CHAPTER XIV.

ISLAND EXTINCTION.

"MIGHT as well call it a day," suggested Cap in calm tone. "Yes, I'm the killer you think. If you want this nice, young man to stay alive, give the word for all to get aboard my ship."

Governor Marbleday's rugged features went white. Under his feet, he could feel the yacht sinking. He must have believed this *Whirlwind* master was the murderer he admitted himself to be. Even his ramrod spirit could hardly stomach being responsible for many deaths.

"I should have had you stopped back there in Miami," he said heavily. "For the moment, you hold the upper hand. Every one will leave the yacht."

"No! No! Not for me!" gulped the yacht captain.

One of Cap's hands barely caressed his jaw. The square-ended fingers of The Skipper did something to the young man's nerves. He ceased speaking, started walking toward the rail like a man in a dream.

The *Whirlwind* grapplers toward the stern were letting go. The governor's yacht was sinking fast. All those aboard started a mad scramble over the rails. Some slipped into the sea, and members of the *Whirlwind* crew fished them out.

But a strange thing happened to all of the yacht personnel as their feet came in contact with the *Whirlwind's* deck plates. Each man stood just where he had landed. His body became rigid. Attempts to move their feet failed.

Three of the governor's guards had boarded the tramp ship with their revolvers still in their hands. They were as hard-boiled as bodyguards should be. Now they felt a queer twitching of their nerves.

Had these guards desired to shoot, they were powerless.

For Cap Fury had given the order to grease the decks. The plates of the *Whirlwind* were charged with an electrical force that virtually paralyzed each newcomer without working injury.

Governor Marbleday was a suddenly broken man. He stood as stiffly as the others, watching his official white yacht slowly keel over. Air hissed, and the boat that must have cost well up to half a million went to the bottom.

The Skipper ordered all of the men from the yacht disarmed. Those aboard the tanker were not affected by the electrical contacts. For each man was wearing shoes with inner soles of non-conducting material.

"Now," said Cap cheerfully, "I'll ask you to revise your belief, governor. You are a brave but somewhat reckless man. It was necessary at the moment for you to think I was this Choker. But in a short time, you will be set straight on that."

Governor Marbleday glared with rage.

"Nevertheless, it's piracy. You will be made to pay in full for this dastardly attack. It could have no explanation."

THE SKIPPER started to speak, but closed his lips as the loud-speaker in the wheelhouse blared forth from its short-wave connection with the communications room.

"So you've got Governor Marbleday, Captain Fury! That is just fine! That may save some of his fine fellows temporarily! But in another minute there will be another message!"

The governor stared at Cap Fury. His deep, uncompromising eyes showed he thought this might be a trick. Just then, Hurricane Dan cut off the "grease" in the deck plates. The governor and his men discovered themselves able to move normally.

"We'll go below and wait for the message," advised Cap. "I imagine you now are going to hear directly from the real Choker."

Governor Marbleday's suspicion of this Captain Fury was sharply renewed when they entered the surprising cabin. The executive of a great State viewed a set-up of modern equipment, fittings of tasteful luxury, rare furnishings gathered from the four corners of the world.

The governor said incisively, "Your ship outside is a monster capable of crushing and sinking other vessels. Down here, you have surrounded yourself with comforts and advanced instruments of science; still you tell me you have a clean record?"

The governor's crew and aids heard The Skipper make a calm, breath-taking statement.

"On your yacht, I told you I was a killer. Perhaps I have killed many men. But I am not the Croker, and I am not involved in any of this diabolical plot to seize State and national control through a murder weapon."

Governor Marbleday shook his head. He rubbed his iron-gray hair. Members of the *Whirlwind* crew guarded his supporters.

Suddenly the radio flashed out again with, *"I am speaking for the Choker. Captain Fury, you may now take your old freighter north to Little Abaco Island. We are already on our way there. It is two hundred miles as you must sail. That gives you twenty-four hours. When you arrive, you may point out to Governor Marbleday that all the inhabitants of the Little Abaco colony are very dead."*

The short wave was abruptly cut off. It seemed that a mild, insinuating laugh ended the communication. Perhaps it was the murdering Preacher with his gentle deviltry.

"I am forced to believe and trust you, Captain Fury," said Governor Marbleday slowly. "What hellishness now is planned, do you suppose?"

THE short wave came on again, as if something had been forgotten.

"Captain Fury! On the next flood tide at Little Abaco, the breathless death will go ashore! Its containers will smash themselves in the surf! The breathless death will vanish within a few minutes! But more than three hundred inhabitants of Little Abaco will be dead! We shall arrive there in about five hours! Your old ship can possibly make it in twenty hours! Point out to the governor this same calamity will fall upon his own cities if he does not consent to dictatorship of the Choker!"

Governor Marbleday groaned, and stared at Cap Fury.

"Can you summon guard cutters, perhaps warships, by radio, Captain Fury? Twenty hours? Heavens, man! They'll do it!"

"We shall not summon cutters or warships to the death of their crews," stated The Skipper. "On the other hand, the *Whirlwind* will arrive at Little Abaco within three hours."

The governor no doubt believed Cap was partly insane. Cap was hastily studying a chart. He called Spike Briggs. His finger traced a channel route. This lay through what is known as "Tongue of the Ocean," west of Nassau; then N. E. Providence Strait and northward around the Great Guana Cay. There lay Little Abaco, just east

of Longitude 78, and south of Latitude 27.

Spike Briggs whipped from the cabin. Within five minutes, the old *Whirlwind* was moving at incredible speed on its mysterious superpower. Perhaps by 1950 all ocean ships will be similarly powered. The wastage of their inadequate propellers will be done away with.

Like a ghostly black monster, the old ship went into Tongue of the Ocean; yet, in the captain's cabin, there was little evidence of the great speed. Captain Fury took Governor Marbleday into his movie projection room.

The Skipper ran off the Royer Stannus murder film. Then he spoke a few direct words to the governor.

Cap pointed out some details in the murder film.

"It couldn't be true—it couldn't!" groaned Governor Marbleday, at Cap's words.

"I fear it is true," stated Cap. "But what I have learned is as yet only a theory. We shall keep that between us until we have met and defeated this breathless death—or have been beaten by it."

The governer nodded, with great grief in his eyes. Whatever Cap had revealed, he agreed it must remain a secret between them until positive proof was at hand.

IT lacked only a short time until dawn when the amazing old *Whirlwind* passed through N. E. Providence Strait out into the open Atlantic. Within an hour, the tanker's passage sent incredulous fishermen hastily making for their harbors. It was impossible to believe they had not seen a ghost ship speeding silently by at such amazing speed.

Governor Marbleday stood with Cap Fury on the bridge. A string of sandy cays lay off the port bow. Northward from these was that strange island of Little Abaco. This cay, or island, can be compared to only one other in the world—the famous Pitcairn Island. Its inhabitants are similar.

"On Little Abaco," Cap told the governor, "there were three hundred and sixty-five persons at the last report. All are the descendants of only two families who fled here after the American Revolution in 1785."

The Skipper's amazing knowledge revealed how a British Loyalist widow had come to Little Abaco from the Carolinas with her children. A daughter married a Carolinian who came with them. Another daughter wed a whaling captain.

On Little Abaco, all the inhabitants are kin, as on the much fictionized island of Pitcairn. They live in houses without glass windows. These are shuttered against fierce hurricanes.

On Little Abaco are no wheeled vehicles, no horses, no chimneys. All the cooking is done in the big ovens outdoors. Food comes from the sea.

"They have a great pen in which loggerhead turtles are kept like pigs," stated Cap. "Iguanas, conchs, oysters and fish are their other food."

Before The Skipper had finished describing the gentle, law-abiding people of Little Abaco, the sandy shores of the island broke over the horizon in the early light of dawn. Cap's binoculars swept the sea in all directions.

No vessel was in sight. In fact, The Skipper did not expect to pick up the craft of the Choker. He scanned the brightening sky as if he feared there might be an airplane. Yet he was convinced the Choker had good reason not to operate in the air.

Governor Marbleday said, "Captain Fury, what can you do to save these people?"

Already the shore line was fringed with virtually all the population of Little Abaco. Browned by the sun, clad in nondescript garments, the members of this isolated colony might have been island natives.

Cap's reply to the governor was, "I suspect we have to become guilty of another abduction. It's the only way, and we will have to work fast."

The old *Whirlwind* was forced to drop anchor well offshore. The men, women and children on the island stared in bewilderment. Such ships never visited their isolated colony. What could it mean?

THE days of piracy were long past. Yet they saw incredible action aboard the tramp ship. A dozen lifeboats slapped from the davits into the gray sea. There was a lagoon harbor, but outside of this the surf boiled over coral reefs. Cap could see how the Choker planned to float breathless-death containers ashore.

Also, The Skipper was able to estimate there would be no flood tide for that purpose before the end of the day, after darkness. This made The Skipper's purpose more difficult. For not only did he plan to rescue the people of Little Abaco, with or against their will, but it was his further intention to possess himself of one of those containers of the breathless death.

On the small wharf of Little Abaco appeared a tall, gaunt figure. Apparently, he was the leader of these people. His face was drawn grimly; for he and the others had seen that twoscore men of the strange tramp ship were in the boats, and that they were equipped with the latest in firearms.

This chief himself carried a shotgun. Half a dozen other men also carried outmoded shotguns and rifles. Probably these were all the weapons at their command. The Little Abaco chief was plainly in dazed bewilderment.

For the people of that island possessed nothing. Money was unknown. Yet, apparently, twoscore piratical ruffians were invading the colony. And the men who were in command of two of the lifeboats did not add any to the confidence of the chief and his supporters.

These were the horribly scarred Spike Briggs and the giant Hurricane Dan, with his matted black hair and bared chest. Truly, this pair looked as if they might kill merely for the joy of it.

Cap Fury stood in the bow of another boat. His stocky figure, the battered master's cap pulled over his rusty hair, was hardly more reassuring than the appearance of his first and second mates. Still The Skipper desired only peace and action.

He hailed the island chief with, "We have no time to waste in explanations. You must assemble your people, and we will transfer them to my ship. Death threatens all of you within a few hours."

The Skipper was aware this would be greeted with skepticism. The gaunt chief whipped up his shotgun.

"Stop where you are!" he commanded. "Such a story, I could not believe! What do you want of my people?"

"Only to save them!" barked The Skipper. "And I'll not argue with you! Every man, woman and child on this island must come aboard! If we are sighted taking you off, then you may still die on our ship!"

This was fantastic argument, as the island chief saw it. He was much confused; and in a minute The Skipper became aware these isolated people had never heard of the breathless death striking two hundred miles southward on the sea.

"We are coming ashore!" rapped The Skipper grimly. "You are coming with us! We would not harm any of you, but it is even better that a few of you die than that all should perish! That is my last word!"

THE chief of Little Abaco howled out oaths. His shotgun belched flame. Small shot peppered the men in The Skipper's boat. The chief's supporters threw up

their guns. But they were only half a dozen men. The huddled inhabitants back of them, among the chimneyless houses, were unarmed. Women and children were taking flight.

From The Skipper's sleeve jumped his automatic. It snapped once, twice, and again. The island chief's shotgun slammed to the wharf. In another *Whirlwind* boat, a sailor fell with a bullet in his heart.

The right hand of the island chief was bloody and broken. A huge revolver in the hand of Peter Doom roared from another boat. The funereal ex-inspector was spacing his shots on Cap's explicit instructions.

Cap and Peter were the only two who used their weapons. On the deck of the distant *Whirlwind,* Governor Marbleday groaned at what he saw. For it seemed The Skipper had made a direct attack upon an innocent people.

Yet when the burst of shooting was over, it was only a *Whirlwind* sailor who had died. The remarkable marksmanship of Cap and Peter had disarmed the island chief and his small group, without greater injury than bloodied hands or smashed wrists.

The *Whirlwind* sailors swarmed ashore. There ensued an indescribable scene of panic among the colonists. White-faced women caught up clubs and stones to defend their children against what seemed to them a piratical invasion.

Precious minutes were wasted. The screaming, battling inhabitants had to be rounded up. Some were carried to the lifeboats. Mothers clung to their children and sobbed. Spike Briggs and Hurricane Dan led an attack with bared fists among the male inhabitants.

Perhaps no rescue in history had ever been accomplished with greater violence. The Skipper seemed everywhere. Only a few times he used his fists. His hypnotizing nerve holds put a score of islanders out of business.

Some of the colonists had fled to the mangroves. There were perhaps a dozen of these. Yet The Skipper would not leave until all had been rounded up. Conducted to the *Whirlwind,* because of their misunderstanding, the three hundred screaming, jabbering inhabitants of Little Abaco had to be confined in the prison brig of the *Whirlwind* and compartments of the lower hold.

The *Whirlwind* lifted anchor with the strangest captives it had ever carried —all abducted to save their lives.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SIREN IN THE NIGHT.

THE old *Whirlwind* departed from Little Abaco Island on its superpower. The tanker's course now was set for a point to the westward, well distant and well concealed from any who might within the next few hours sight Little Abaco.

Hurricane Dan Belmont was in command. Cap Fury had directed the *Whirlwind* be held on the Little Bahama bank, off Grand Bahama Island. For The Skipper was no longer aboard his ship.

As the *Whirlwind* moved, what appeared to be a great silver fish emerged from its hold. This was a stream-lined submarine of compact design. The sub was powered with a tubular force. It was capable of a speed that would triple that of any other modern underwater craft.

With Cap were Governor Marbleday, Peter Doom, Spike Briggs, "Cock-eye," the *Whirlwind's* third mate, and two others of the crew. The stream-lined sub flashed under the sea as the plates of the old tanker closed. Perhaps a mile northward, the sub lay to in a sheltered cove.

Governor Marbleday was considerably dazed.

"You attacked and forcibly rescued three hundred persons, and yet not one

person was more than slightly wounded," stated the governor. "Captain Fury, I am beginning to place great confidence in your resourcefulness."

The Skipper only grinned. He slapped back a lock of his rusty air.

"Save the compliments, governor," he said finally. "When the sun drops, perhaps all will not go so well."

Cap had estimated wind and tide. It would be an hour after nightfall before the full set of the flood tide could carry any containers of the breathless death into the surf of Little Abaco. Cap noted there would be the light of the nearly full moon at that time. His mouth set grimly.

From the hidden submarine, The Skipper's glasses swept the sea. Only once, late in the afternoon, did anything appear. This was not a ship. The ocean seemed to remain clear of even small fishing craft. The thing was like the back of a whale.

Thick smoke rolled up from cooking fires on Little Abaco. The Skipper had seen to that. He had caused all the outdoor ovens to be fired with heavy, green wood. Observing eyes would surely believe life was going on as usual in the isolated colony, though none was there.

Cap had observed what had looked like a whale's back. He knew it was not a denizen of the sea. This was what he had been waiting for. It was the craft on which Bumps McCarthy and Tarna Rodens had been carried to the cay of the breathless death.

Also, it probably was responsible for the torpedo that had blasted the yacht *Petrel.*

SINCE the communication from the mysterious prisoner by radio, Cap had known the Choker was using a powerful submarine. And he knew now this sub was lying off Little Abaco, waiting for the sweep of the flood tide toward the island coral breakers to launch the containers of breathless death.

The Skipper was grimly humorous. For the Choker on his submarine must have believed the old *Whirlwind* was still hours away from Little Abaco. The Choker expected to annihilate three hundred souls, leave the strewn dead as a demonstration to Governor Marbleday of the terrible power through which State dictatorship was demanded.

As the sun dropped, the flood tide was pushing in from the Atlantic. Cap issued swift instructions. Then only did Governor Marbleday and the others learn of his daring plan, of his determination that the lives of his companions should not be risked.

"It is enough for one man," stated The Skipper. "I shall employ one of the deep-sea diving suits with its oxygen tanks. It may be necessary to use the oxygen for only a few minutes. If possible, I shall intercept one of the breathless death containers."

Spike Briggs swore terribly. Cap commanded him to hold the submarine ready for his signal. Spike, Peter, the governor and the others were to remain inside the stream-lined sub with its ample supply of oxygen. By reason of that, they would be safe enough from the breathless death, if any container were smashed by the breakers on the coral.

"You should stay submerged and watch for the green rocket flare through the periscope," instructed The Skipper.

His companions protested, but Cap gave them no heed. As the sun disappeared, The Skipper emerged on the island shore. He was a queer, shining figure in the deep-sea armor. The headpiece of this was so adjusted Cap could breathe in the upper air. Also, he could descend into the sea and remain for considerable time by use of the oxygen supply.

As darkness closed in Little Abaco, Cap reached the vicinity of the coral

reefs. Several times, he had sighted the Choker's submarine in line with these reefs. Now the submarine was hidden perhaps half a mile at sea.

The Skipper rested on a wave-washed reef. The flood tide was flowing over the coral. Moonlight gave some illumination of the smooth water outside the dashing breakers. The Skipper crawled to the outside reef and crouched there, watching.

Fires in the cooking ovens ashore now showed glowing red eyes. And out there in the sea, Cap knew the ruthless Choker must be watching those fires, firm in the belief he was about to murder many persons.

The Skipper could well have matched his own sub against that of the Choker. But he had set out to solve all of the mystery of the breathless death. The Choker must be permitted to carry out his plans; then, the origin of this terrible force must be traced.

Cap did not know what chemical power was being employed. But its source must be destroyed.

INTO the moonlight bobbed two floating objects. They were not large. Only The Skipper's keen eyes could have picked out such small cigar-box affairs in that light. They floated buoyantly, advancing a little on each succeeding swell. They were about twenty yards apart, but they were foreign enough to make sure they were not ordinary driftwood.

Cap instantly set the buoyancy chambers of his deep-sea suit. As the breathless death containers bobbed closer, he snapped his helmet shut, releasing the oxygen in the flat tanks. For the space of perhaps twenty minutes, he could remain alive under water.

For the same length of time, if one of these containers—or another he had not seen—was dashed to pieces on the reef, he would be protected from the breathless death. His steel-wire arms drove him toward the nearest floating object.

The steel talons of his suit took hold of the tossing box gingerly. Even that slight touch threatened the fragile sides. And Cap was sure death of the most terrible character was inclosed.

He seemed very much alone on these barren reefs. There was only the glow of the oven fires ashore. Out there, perhaps very near, the Choker's submarine probably lurked on the bottom—waiting for death to strike.

Cap moved in the water, pushing the one container before him. Being thus in the sea, he had to lift his body to seek the other box. For more than a minute, he did not locate it. Then his hair suddenly crawled. For the other container was being lifted on a rolling wave over the sharp edges of the outer coral.

The Skipper was powerless to reach it. The container he held made it impossible for him to move quickly. One wrong touch, and he knew this fragile box would break in his hands. He believed the oxygen he was breathing would protect him. But already some five minutes had passed.

The other container struck the reef. Cap saw it shiver to bits. He looked intently to see if there was any visible reaction. There was none from whatever element the box might have contained. No flash, no light.

THEN a remarkable thing happened. Inside the reefs were flocks of gulls, a few pelicans, some petrels. They had been roosting among the rocks. Perhaps Cap's near-by movement had disturbed them. Some were flying in the moonlight.

The gulls were crying. Possibly a hundred shadowy bird shapes had been hovering above the reef.

Now these birds began falling. There was no beating of their wings. They dropped inertly in the moonlight, as if

each had been instantly killed by flying shot. Their bodies struck in the smooth water back of the reefs.

Cap realized he had only a few minutes left for breathing from the oxygen tanks in his diving armor. Holding that deadly container of the breathless death, he climbed through the breakers on the sharp reefs.

He managed to reach the smooth water and the sand of the beach beyond this. It was weird, his moving, the only living thing on Little Abaco Island. For his running feet carried him past the big pen of giant loggerhead turtles.

Fifty or more big turtles were dead, their beaklike mouths thrust out on long necks, reaching for breath denied them.

The Skipper wondered grimly how long this murder spell would linger over Little Abaco? Perhaps he had better signal his sub to pick him up now.

Fumbling with steel fingers for the rocket in a flap pocket of the diving suit, Cap struck his foot against the fragile box containing more of the breathless death. The container shivered, broke.

"Now that makes it just about perfect," muttered Cap. "All this trouble, and nothing comes of it."

But he knew something had come of it. He suddenly realized the menace to his own life had increased by several minutes. More of the breathless death was flooding the atmosphere.

Then Cap Fury felt an icy chill go over him. The flap pocket where a rocket of green signal light should have been had snapped open. His rocket pistol, the only means of signaling Spike Briggs on the submarine, was gone.

The Skipper started running clumsily in his suit, fighting to cover as much space as possible before his oxygen should fail.

CAP might have despaired altogether if he could have known of two swift happenings since he had left his submarine.

One of these took place in the cramped space of another black submarine submerged a half mile out. This was the Choker's craft. In it was Bumps McCarthy. Near him was Tarna Rodens. The Preacher was in command, but he was receiving orders apparently from another man who had remained hidden in a forward compartment—the Choker.

Bumps had been told that to-morrow he would take his final pictures, a film of the dead of Little Abaco Island. He had seen the launching of the fragile boxes of the breathless death. There had been what seemed like hours of waiting.

Suddenly, the concealed Choker had given the Preacher a quick command. The Preacher transmitted this to his men.

By chance, the Choker's sub had drifted close to the other submarine owned by Cap Fury. Apparently, the Choker's men knew considerable about The Skipper.

"Captain Fury must be on that sub," stated the Preacher. "And if he is, we want him."

Bumps and Tarna Rodens had been bound. Bumps sat silent, his nerves twitching. What were they about to do?

The Preacher said the containers of breathless death could not hit Little Abaco for some time. And he was having his men untie Tarna Rodens. The girl attempted to speak. The Preacher cut her lips with a slapping, pudgy hand.

The Choker's submarine moved, shot to the surface. Bumps heard the Preacher say, "Strip her! Use the masks in case that stuff hits the rocks too soon! There's a shoal sandbar between us and that *Whirlwind* sub! Bring her up, and I'll tell you what to do!"

Bumps McCarthy writhed helplessly. He saw most of the girl's clothing pulled from her lovely body. She was lifted through the conning turret and vanished from his view. The Preacher followed.

Bumps felt the submarine touch sand

lightly. It remained there only a few minutes. The Preacher and his men came back inside without the girl. Bumps had seen them place an oxygen mask over her head.

"What in hell have you dirty killers thought up now?" rapped Bumps. "It would be mercy to kill Miss Rodens and end it!"

"Mercy, my friend, has its degrees," stated the Preacher gently. "I understand your good Captain Fury is a great hero. Now he would want to rescue a fair damsel in distress, wouldn't he?"

Bumps locked his teeth. He had never felt more helpless. He was now aware Cap Fury and the men of the *Whirlwind* were close. And he could do nothing to warn them.

AT this time, Spike Briggs had glued his eyes to the observing glass of their periscope. True, he could detect little on the surface of the moonlit sea, but he had the detectors going and he was aware that the other submarine must have moved closer.

The periscope device of the *Whirlwind* sub was unusual. It was equipped with a listening as well as a seeing power. Spike caught the grating of metal somewhere beyond his limited range of vision.

"We've got to lie quiet an' take it!" he grunted to Peter Doom. "It would be tough if anything happened to us before we get Cap's signal! Tough on Cap!"

"Some time, Cap will make his last mistake," rumbled Peter Doom. "All of us should have gone after those containers!"

Through the periscope listening device came a shrill scream. It was a woman's penetrating voice. It was packed with pain and terror.

"Careful, Spike!" warned Peter Doom.

The scream came again. Regardless of the proximity of the submarine of the Choker, Spike Briggs never was one to pass up a woman in distress. He touched a button, and a fanlight flared from the sub's periscope.

"By the great hornspoon!" he shouted. "Peter, look here! A woman's been stranded on a shoal! The flood tide's comin' in! The slimy devils have left her to drown!"

Peter saw the figure in the periscope observation glass. It might have been a siren of the sea. The light showed a girl's nearly stripped figure on a near-by sandbar. The water was washing over her soft body.

The woman's head was encased in what looked like a black hood. Still, she had screamed. She was moving, attempting to keep the strongly flowing tide from sweeping her into deeper water.

Disregarding Peter Doom's protest, Spike Briggs shot the water from the sub's submerging tanks. The craft arose quickly to the surface. As Spike tore open the conning-tower hatch, he saw the gleaming body of the girl slip off the sandbar.

The swearing Peter Doom was following. At Spike's order, the third mate, Cock-eye, was standing by the controls. Peter slid onto the sub's turtle deck. Spike already was in the sea, swimming toward the spot where the girl had disappeared.

Peter's straining eyes could see nothing beyond the sandbar. The fanlight only threw that space of sea into deeper darkness. Spike swam perhaps fifty yards, then suddenly dived. Peter saw him come up. One graceful arm of the girl was over his shoulders.

Spike was turning back toward the sub; then, from near the sandbar, half a dozen masked figures seemed to arise from the sea. They surged toward the *Whirlwind's* first mate and the girl. Peter saw Spike attempt to beat them off, but he was outnumbered, swept under.

One of Peter Doom's huge revolvers roared. One of the masked attackers reared up, then sank. But Spike and the girl were snatched from his view into the darkness beyond the sandbar. Almost immediately, metal grated.

Peter emitted terrible oaths and emptied his revolver of bullets, knowing they were hitting nothing. He heard air hissing from the tanks of another submarine. The vessel was submerging.

Hunting the other submarine was useless. Peter slid through the conning hatch. Cock-eye stared at him. Peter's funereal countenance held deepest gloom.

"Spike's gone, the crazy, damn fool!" he rumbled. "We've got to go under! Go under and wait for Cap's signal or they'll grab him, too! They were the devils off a sub, and they were masked! That breathless death must be due to strike!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE REDOUBTABLE SPIKE.

PETER DOOM was correct; he did not know how close he had come to being caught by the breathless death. Nor did he know that almost as Cock-eye closed the conning hatch and again submerged, one of the murder containers had slapped upon the reef of Little Abaco.

The third mate, Cock-eye, decided that obeying Cap's order to lie to in their present position and await The Skipper's rocket signal would be a mistake. The sudden snatching away of Spike Briggs was warning enough that their presence had been detected. It would be possible to see The Skipper's pick-up signal rocket from any position within several miles.

Cock-eye sent the *Whirlwind* sub nosing into deeper water. When he was clear, he shot the periscope above the surface, cruising along the shore line toward the reefs where The Skipper had gone.

It was only a short time later when Cap Fury smashed the second container of the breathless death. The loss of Cap's rocket pistol gave him less than three minutes to live, or so he estimated.

His diving-suit oxygen supply was nearly exhausted. When he would be compelled to open his helmet to breathe, he was convinced his lungs could suck in only the murder element.

Then he had a sudden thought. Acting upon it, he plunged from a reef into the sea. There had been no dead fish. Then the breathless death could not be effective under water. Not that Cap could stay under for long when his oxygen was gone.

The Skipper swung the weight levers in the diving armor. He considered his situation with hard fatalism. Then he smiled grimly.

"The sea has given much," he murmured. "I've always expected some day a clean death. None could be better."

Which meant The Skipper had seen many who had died of the Choker's murder element. Died, to lie with gaping mouths, clawing hands and blackening faces. Well, he never would look like that deep down. Let his friends of the deep sea take him.

CAP was down, walking slowly along the stringing kelpweed. Ahead of him, he felt the movement of some vast body. Perhaps it was a giant squid, or one of the mammoth sting rays of this coast. Cap pressed his armor's flashlight button.

An underwater ray shot out. It was a blue light. He saw the flat, terrible figure of a big sting ray. The flat fish moved sluggishly. Cap fully believed it would not be long before he would be food for such monsters as this.

Suddenly, there was a tightness at his throat. His lungs were beginning to labor. So he knew the last of the oxygen was being reached.

Had there been time enough for the

breathless death to have dissipated itself in the upper air? Even as his mind asked this question, he knew there had not been. That murder element had been intended to spread far, to linger long enough to destroy several hundred persons now imprisoned aboard his *Whirlwind.*

Cap breathed slowly, but he was becoming dizzy. He felt consciousness slipping away.

"If I could only have got at the bottom of this mystery," he whispered. "Perhaps Peter Doom may be able to beat this Choker."

But even as he tried to cheer himself with the thought, he had little faith in it. The Choker would carry out his purpose. The Choker——

The Skipper's thinking ceased. He lurched, swayed on his weighted feet. His body became that of a standing dead man, or at least of one whose reasoning consciousness has departed.

How long he remained there, a lifeless image swinging on its weighted feet to the flow of the tide, Cap never would know. But he realized when stabbing knives went through his lungs. He was gulping in air, pure air, undefiled by the breathless death.

Something was pushing into his lower ribs. The force seemed more than he could breathe against. The Skipper slowly opened his eyes. The face of Cock-eye, his third mate, was close to his own.

Cock-eye's knees were in his stomach. A respirator was over his mouth and nostrils. It was the heaving effort to breathe in new life that was tearing like knives at his lungs.

For Cap Fury had been almost a dead man—as dead as he would ever be. And had not Cock-eye been following the rocks of the shore under water, and watching them closely for the steering of the stream-lined sub, The Skipper would have been a lifeless image with weighted feet.

Cock-eye had seen Cap's blue underwater light. He had gone out through the underwater diving chamber and brought The Skipper in. Now Cap heard Governor Marbleday uttering a thankful oath.

Next, he heard Peter Doom say, "And we've got to tell him they've got Spike Briggs."

AT this moment, Spike Briggs was in little better condition than The Skipper. He had found himself in the hands of overpowering numbers. As he was pulled aboard the Choker's submarine with the girl, Tarna Rodens, Spike swore bitterly.

The sub went down, and the girl's oxygen mask was pulled off. She stood before Spike in her torn, thin garments. The names Spike called her would not bear repeating.

"Sea cat!" was the mildest of these. "So it's you! I've believed all the time you're no better than the rest of them!"

"Enough of that, my friend," said a man with mild, pale eyes. It was the Preacher. "We wanted Captain Fury. Now why did you come? If Captain Fury had been on your sub, he would not have sent you after the girl."

Spike was being firmly held by two men. He deliberately spat at the Preacher.

"Wouldn't you slimy squids like to know what's become of The Skipper?" he jeered.

The Preacher beat Spike's long nose with his doubled fist. Blood flowed, but Spike still leered at him.

"If you only knew what you're addin' up for yourself!" said Spike.

Two men had been holding his wrists. They were big men. The first mate was surrounded by enemies. He saw Bumps McCarthy bound on the floor. The Choker's submarine was under, moving.

Suddenly, the two men holding Spike felt themselves lifted. They were hurled away. It seemed impossible there could

be so much dynamite in that small body of the first mate.

Spike's ripsaw fists slashed open the face of another man. The *Whirlwind* first mate made a flying dive toward the submarine controls. What he might have done then, he was not sure.

But Spike did nothing. One man swung the flat side of an automatic. The crunch of metal on bone was sickening. Spike rolled over, lungs gasping for air. He stiffened suddenly and lay quiet.

"You fool, you shouldn't have hit him so hard!" rapped the Preacher. "You've finished him, cracked his skull! There were things he might have told us!"

Spike's skull was not cracked. That tough head could take it. He was not even unconscious, only dizzy and sick. But with quick wit, the first mate convulsed his body, then permitted his arms and legs to become limp.

DURING all of this time the Choker issued orders from his concealed compartment. The arch-murderer seemed averse to appearing in the main control room of the sub.

The Preacher said, "We will remove these three to the pirate ship. The boss will cruise around the cay. If this Captain Fury approaches in his sub, he will be tricked into the area of the breathless death."

The Preacher picked four men to accompany him. In a brief time, the submarine slid into the deep channel leading to the cay of the breathless death. Deep silence of near-dawn now shrouded the sinister island. The Blackbeard ship stood out blackly like the charred bones of some ancient monster.

Two men carried Spike Briggs ashore. He was barely breathing. The Choker told the Preacher, "Keep close watch. We will circle the cay. If that Captain Fury sub comes nosing around, we'll use a torpedo."

Bumps McCarthy let go a little snort under his breath. The cameraman was scornful of the Choker's ability to overcome Cap's lightning submarine. But Bumps was kicked along toward the pirate wreck.

Tarna Rodens was a beautiful, but woeful figure. She seemed to have lost all consciousness of her womanhood. Only a few scanty garments clung to her curving body; but the mere matter of herself apparently did not affect her.

Bumps noted she had been tense only at intervals. These were when the hidden Choker had been speaking. Tarna had informed Bumps she knew the Choker. But she had acted as if she were not sure of her conviction.

Spike Briggs apparently saw nothing, heard nothing. His bloody, much-scarred head swung on his limp neck as he was carried. One of the men holding him said, "What's the use hanging onto this fellow, Preacher? We ought've dumped him. His skull's cracked."

"Still he might revive enough to talk before he passes out," stated the Preacher. "When a man's about to die, he tells things. The boss would like to know more of this Captain Fury and how that old tramp ship or that sub could have beat us to Little Abaco."

The Choker's sub had moved back to sea as soon as the others had landed. Bumps's arms still were tightly bound, though his feet had been freed. The nearly stripped Tarna Rodens had not again been tied.

The little party entered the bulk-headed compartment of the old pirate wreck. Bumps immediately listened for some movement from the other mysterious prisoner in an adjoining room. But he heard no sound.

The two carriers dumped Spike roughly onto the floor. Bumps sat down against the wall. Spike's small body was as limp as a deflated inner tube. The blood, drying, made his scarred face a hideous mask.

Bumps watched the Preacher fill a hypodermic syringe. The Preacher bent

over Spike. He punched the hypo needle toward Spike's neck. Then the pale-eyed Preacher must have thought all hell had broken loose.

SPIKE arose from the floor with the velocity of a released steel spring. His grubby hands had seized upon the Preacher's ears. His stony skull snapped upward, its impervious bone slamming straight into the Preacher's exposed chin.

"*Aw-r-r-k!*" choked from the Preacher's throat.

His lower jaw bone slued sideways. Perhaps it had been broken. It may have been only dislocated. There was one hanging gasoline lamp in the wreck compartment. Spike hurled the Preacher from him.

The first mate had not been near death. At no time had he been wholly unconscious. Almost in the same movement with which he put the Preacher to the floor, he went upward toward the swinging lamp. The lamp crashed, tore loose; flame ran around it.

The Preacher groveled on the floor. His attempted speech was no longer gentle. It was not even coherent. For his jaw was dislocated. One torn ear dripped blood where it had been pulled from his head.

The Preacher's four companions were for ten seconds in a suspended state of shock. One snapped out of it when Bumps McCarthy let out a roar, doubled his legs and jumped. The cameraman's wrists were bound behind him. That did not prevent his huge red head from almost snapping the spine of the man he hit.

The other three men were pulling at their guns. One got his automatic out, and blue flame sliced at Spike. Spike pivoted and went down; but in that movement, he hurled the blazing gasoline lamp upon the gunman.

Bumps was attempting to regain his balance. This was difficult, due to his tied wrists.

The two other men on their feet had their guns out. One let out a curse and aimed at Bumps in the semi-darkness. Another shot split the room. Bullets plowed close to Bumps, but the man shooting them was dead before his gun stopped racketing.

Tarna Rodens stood in the middle of the room. The flare of the burning gasoline lamp made her lovely figure stand out. She held a gun she had snatched from the man Bumps had knocked out with his head.

Coolly, without a tremor, she again pulled the trigger. She had put a bullet into the brain of the man shooting at Bumps. She added another for the other armed man on his feet.

The fellow who had collected the gasoline lamp was writhing on the floor and screaming. His clothing had caught. There was the smell of hair and scorched flesh.

SPIKE got to his feet with his left arm swinging from a broken upper bone where a bullet had hit. This did not prevent the tough first mate from swiftly collecting the guns of the dead and the injured.

Tarna Rodens found a knife and slashed the cords on Bumps's wrists. Bumps saw the fire from the blazing lamp would not get to the wreck timbers. It was too late to do anything about the man who had been deluged with the flaming gasoline.

"The miserable wretch!" exclaimed Tarna Rodens, with something like pity in her voice for the first time. "Even a mad dog shouldn't be permitted to die like that!"

The gun in her hand sped a bullet into the burning man's body. His tortured screams ceased.

Bumps said, "Come on! We'll have to find some way off the island before that damned Choker gets back!"

The cool Tarna Rodens said, "You must get away! But I shall be here when the Choker comes!"

Bumps saw that she was inspecting her gun to see that bullets still stayed in the magazine. The cameraman gathered the girl must have very special reasons for hating the Choker.

The three got outside. There was a heavy, pitted teakwood bar for the door of the oxygen compartment. They dropped it into place. Bumps led the way into another part of the wreck.

"That other fellow was just back of their radio room," he said. "We must get him out."

Tarna Rodens surprised him by saying, "I think he is no longer there. Either they caught him when he used the radio to Captain Fury, or he got away."

This proved to be true. The room where the mysterious prisoner had been was empty. Bumps inspected the radio instruments. He attempted to send a signal that would pick up the *Whirlwind* or the submarine of Cap Fury.

"That fellow put the short-wave transmitter out of business," he announced, after a futile effort. "If they've got him, then they must have rubbed him out."

"He was too smart for them," stated Tarna Rodens. "Much too smart. A long time ago, I should have married him when he asked me. I made a great mistake."

"Sweet hell!" ejaculated Bumps. "Who is he, or was he?"

"Only he can tell you," smiled the girl thinly. "I am not at liberty to talk of his affairs."

"Sweet Davy Jones!" rapped Spike Briggs. "You're as slippery as a squid! But you're handy with a gun, and I thank you! Good gosh! You've gotta have a pair of pants or something!"

Spike seemed for the first time to notice the lovely girl's lack of conventional attire. Nursing his broken arm, he directed Bumps back into the room where the Preacher and the dead men lay.

When they came out, they had a dead man's trousers and shirt. Tarna Rodens put these on. It was mid-morning on the cay. Even the blue sky above the place of breathless death hardly relieved the sinister pall hanging over the island.

BUMPS led the way to the middle of the island. There was an almost perfect, round black spot. It was a hundred feet in diameter. Once before, Bumps had said he had taken the film of a fallen meteor. He repeated this, walking around the queer black place.

"The ground has been burned like the vicinity of a meteor I photographed out in Oregon," stated Bumps. "This meteor fell here not many months ago. By Jiminy! I've got it! There was a meteor lighted all of Manhattan about a year ago. They thought it fell into the ocean close to New York. But what's a few hundred miles to a meteor?"

They walked cautiously about the black spot. Spike touched the dark surface. It was smooth, almost oily.

"Tarred, by the holies!" he shrilled. "All over! They must have used the native pine tar!"

Bumps was looking closely at a small, round tower of metal. This had a round, closed door. Pipes like silver ventilators were pointing upward.

"I've got it!" he said excitedly. "That tar's air-tight! This breathless death comes from some unknown element in that meteor! Whoever investigated the killing of sailors around here was smart enough to employ oxygen masks! Then he harnessed this meteor death, so it could be released at will! And it's something that can be put into air-tight containers and transported!"

Tarna Rodens nodded agreement.

"I believe you have guessed it," she

said. "Well, I'll tell you, that is correct. I know the man who was smart enough to trace the Manhattan meteor. And now perhaps they have killed him. If I had married him, this never would have happened."

Spike Briggs stared at the queer girl. A killer, she was. But you could not guess for whom, or why she killed. She had been most indiscriminate about murder, the way Spike saw it.

Spike said, "Hell! Wasn't you to marry Royer Stannus, that swab who was the first to die?"

The girl's eyes blazed fiercely for an instant. The light died out of them.

"Yes," she said slowly. "I was to have married Royer Stannus. But you've got to find a way off this island. The Choker will be coming back. There's little place to hide. His masked men will hunt you out by turning on the breathless death."

At that instant, there was a crashing sound in the mangroves. Bumps's instant thought was that some members of the Choker's gang had remained hidden. The three fugitives darted to concealment.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MAN IN THE MASK.

THE crashing sound in the mangroves ceased. Yet the three fleeing fugitives were convinced eyes had spied upon them. The girl apparently took command.

"I have to find a way for you to get off the cay," she said. "There must be some small boat, or perhaps we could fix up a raft of driftwood."

They had seen the two fishing schooners had been removed from the wharf. Just why this had been done, they did not know. The available supply of driftwood was scanty.

The three reached a tongue of the cay, perhaps half a mile from the place of the breathless death. This was as far as the cay extended. They realized distance would be no protection if the murder element were released.

Tarna Rodens bandaged Spike's arm. She splinted it with some driftwood. A portion of her few undergarments served for a binding.

For some time Spike kept watch, while Bumps and Tarna worked at fastening driftwood together with mangroves stems for lashings. This was slow work. Whoever had caused that movement in the mangroves was not heard again.

Noon, afternoon passed. Still the raft was not sufficient to support even two persons. Tarna Rodens still maintained she was not leaving the island. This caused Spike to again suspect the girl.

She knew too much. She wanted to stay here.

In mid-afternoon, a storm broke. It was one of those sudden black squalls of the Bahamas. Lashing rain, wind and driving sand laid darkness across the cay. The three were forced to crawl into the mangroves. The sudden storm surf smashed their poor attempt at raft-building.

Bracing himself against the storm's wind, Bumps ascended a lone palmetto. Hardly had he reached the top before he yelled:

"The Choker's come! His sub's in the channel! They're all coming off, and they are all wearing their masks! We've got to do what we can to stop them!"

It was the cool, calculating girl who restrained Bumps. For there were at least twoscore masked men landing from the sub in the black rain. They had not enough bullets to account for more than half of these, if every bullet had counted.

"We can only wait," said the girl. "You will remain here with your wounded friend. I must get closer. Perhaps they will not at once release the breathless death. If they attempt it, I shall start shooting, then you may come."

The amazing young woman slid ino the mangroves. She disappeared.

"She's in on this thing somehow!" spat out Spike. "Didn't they grab her outta that jail in Miami?"

"You're a wrong little nut when it comes to women, Spike," said Bumps stoutly.

But his own faith was not as strong as his words. Nevertheless, Spike with his broken arm was in no condition for battle unless it were forced. Now it seemed as if it was to be fight or die.

BUMPS and Spike heard profane shouts. The Choker and his men from the sub had discovered the death and havoc in the old wreck. Even under this stress, Spike's face broke into an ugly grin.

It'll be tough on that Preacher swab, tryin' to tell 'em what happened with that loose jaw of his," he commented.

Whether the Preacher succeeded in talking, there came a shouted order. The black squall was still like night. One tall man with a hooded oxygen mask over his head was directing the others. Undoubtedly, he was the Choker. He led the way toward the small tower of the breathless death.

At this moment, in the mangroves close to the tarred black spot, a strange figure was crawling. His clothing was in tatters. He was haggard, hollow-eyed. As he moved, he paused often as if to renew his breath. When the Choker and his men emerged from the submarine, this man attempted to rise, to run toward them.

But he had fallen down. He had dashed directly into a mangrove trunk. Now he seemed to be feeling his way along the ground. This proved he must be blind. His hair was plastered over his face by the rain. The facial muscles sagged under loose skin, as if the man had been fat, but had lost flesh in a short space of time.

Still the man crawled slowly forward, guided by the voices of the Choker and his men. There was an air of fatalism about his movement, as if he knew he was going to his death.

But in the blinded man's hand was a long, sharp instrument. It gleamed like a knife. The weapon was a rod that might have been ripped from a short-wave radio set. For this man was the mysterious prisoner who had been in the wreck. And he had smashed the radio.

The man whom Tarna Rodens said she should have married.

Now, at this time, the Choker apparently was loath to place his own valuable person too close to his own disseminator of murder. He was directing others of his men toward the small tower.

"There's one I would have liked to save!" grated the Choker's voice through his mask. "He must still be on the cay, but now we have no time! He shall die with the others! Then we must load the containers with all they will hold! This Captain Fury and his sub have disappeared, but he is a smart fellow, too damned smart!"

Owing to the black rain, lights were made to leap out around the small tower of the breathless death. This cast an eerie circle of illumination. The Choker was standing in the edge of the mangroves, in the deep shadow at their wind-waved rim.

"Open up the death!" he shouted through his mask.

A PAIR of hands reached from the mangroves behind him. They slid up under his mask with the speed of a snake striking. The fingers were the texture of cold steel, as ruthless as the claws of a tiger. The Choker ceased to breathe.

At the same time, another voice rapped out peremptorily. Yet its tone was so exactly like that of the Choker himself, his masked man could not detect any difference.

"No! Hold it!" the voice shouted. It was as if the Choker had suddenly changed his mind. "We'll wait until the storm blows over! Maybe we'll find my very good friend! The breathless death would be too quick a way for him to die!"

Apparently, the masked men were accustomed to sudden reversals of the Choker's mind. Two had their hands on levers of the small tower. They stepped back.

In that flashing space of seconds, the hands that had gripped the real Choker's throat slipped the hooded mask from its place. The owner of the hands looked at the face of the Choker. Then he chuckled deep in his throat.

The throttling hands belonged to Captain Fury. For hours, he had been lying in wait. The stream-lined submarine was near the cay. The Skipper had come ashore. He had known of the escape of Spike, Bumps and the girl. But for his own purpose, he had lain in wait.

Cap wanted the Choker first. He wanted to see his face, to confirm a belief he had held. Now he saw that face close up, saw the features of the murderer, the one who planned to seize the government of a State, perhaps of a nation. Seize it through murder and terror.

Cap then did a strange thing. He restored the hooded mask to the unconscious Choker. And he stepped directly into the light around the small tower. The masked men saw him fully revealed, his face unmasked. Yet they stood there awaiting further command.

For they did not recognize The Skipper of the old *Whirlwind*. In every feature, Cap was the counterpart of the Choker. His hair was no longer rusty and straggling. It was black, mixed with gray, and it was combed into a high pompadour.

Cap's eyes were no longer blue and piercing. They were deep and dark, close set beside a beaked nose—or so it seemed. His exact imitation of the Choker's voice made the deception perfect.

Now he said, "When the rain stops, we will find this fine double-crosser! He will be made to pay a thousand deaths for calling Captain Fury and the *Whirlwind!* Return to the wreck until the rain ends! You can remove your masks!"

The men were pulling off their masks. They were not aware their real leader lay unconscious in the thick mangrooves. And now Cap ordered them, "Remain in the wreck! I want to find Jammer Cartnel alone!"

AS the men stared at him, Cap whipped suddenly into the black rain. The men grasped the opportunity to seek the shelter of the Blackbeard wreck. The Skipper slipped through the mangroves.

In the half-darkness of the storm, the tattered, haggard man who had been crawling, must have put all of his will into a strength that brought him to his feet.

"I said I'd get you—I said it!" he slavered.

He lurched toward the sound of Cap's movement, the sharp radio rod raised and quivering to strike. Cap eluded the weapon easily and caught the man's wrist.

"It's Captain Fury, Cartnel," he stated quietly. "You're a brave man. So the radio got your eyes when you wrecked it! Well, perhaps that will be only temporary. Now you will do as I say, and your mission will have been accomplished."

For this man, the mystery prisoner of the pirate wreck who had radioed the *Whirlwind,* was no other than the drunken Jammer Cartnel, the political manager for Royer Stannus. At first suspected by Cap Fury and his companions, Jammer Cartnel had been play-

ing a deep game of his own—a game that was meant to thwart the plot of wholesale murder. The Skipper had intuition which had led him to see some of this from the beginning, though he had not been sure.

Jammer Cartnel shivered and waved on his feet in the rain.

"Captain Fury?" he said. "I heard the Choker! Where are your men? What has happened to Tarna Rodens?"

"In good time, you'll know," stated The Skipper. "Tarna Rodens is safe. For the present, I am alone. If you could see me, you would think you were really looking at the Choker. But you must do now as I say."

Cap issued fast instructions. Within a few minutes, he had communicated with Cock-eye and Peter Doom aboard the submarine. As he walked from the mangroves with Jammer Cartnel into the light shed by the tower of breathless death, Cock-eye and Peter, with the sailors aboard the sub, were wading ashore in the dark storm.

The men from the submarine were carrying long flat boxes. They had been directed by Cap where these were to be placed. Concealed by mangroves, Peter and Cock-eye quickly laid these flat boxes close to the tarred black spot of the meteor-murder element.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE UNMASKED CHOKER

IMMEDIATELY after placing the flat boxes near the black spot of the breathless death, Cock-eye and Peter Doom went back aboard the streamlined submarine. The sub was speedily submerged. It streaked from the shoals of the cay into the deep channel. Within a short time, it was lying submerged directly beside the Choker's own deserted submarine.

As this was happening, Cap Fury appeared, walking in the light of the death tower, with Jammer Cartnel beside him. The Skipper's hand gripped the wrist of the other man. Apparently, he struck Jammer's face with the flat of his other hand.

Those of the Choker's men at the door into the pirate wreck chuckled evilly.

"The boss'll make Jammer wish he was dead," grunted one with tongue licking his lips. "This will be some show."

He apparently spoke the truth. Cap was openly abusive to the blind, staggering prisoner. But he was talking in a low tone.

"We'll have to kill a little time until my sub is all set," Cap was saying. "When the time comes, Cartnel, this breathless death will be blown to hell. You told me over the radio it was a crystal element in that Manhattan meteor, and that it dissolved rapidly when exposed to the air."

"That is right, captain," whispered Cartnel huskily. "I was the one who discovered it, and first used the masks. I had no idea what use would be made of it. It was tarred over, because it would have dissipated itself. Still, there are tons of it in that buried meteor and it could have been used to terrorize all of America before it was exhausted."

The two were coming close now to the pirate wreck. The storm was lightening. Late afternoon daylight filtered slowly from the rain-ridden sky. As a final gesture, Cap struck Jammer Cartnel sharply across the face with his knuckles.

"And you'll pay through the nose, damn you, for every traitorous move you've made!" he bellowed in the voice of the Choker.

The listening men at the door of the pirate wreck licked their lips. This was going to be sweet. Apparently, they were filled with the sadistic joy of the coming torture.

Cap pushed Jammer Cartnel roughly, and the blinded man fell to his knees.

THEN, from fringing mangroves, came the cold, angry voice of Tarna Rodens. An oath rippled from the girl's lips. A clean, mad oath, such as a woman would utter in the mood of a great revenge.

"—and you'll die now, as my brother died!"

These words were punctuated by one shot, then another shot. Both bullets sped from the girl's automatic as the heavy, round figure of Bumps McCarthy flashed from the bushes behind her. The cameraman had acted on an intuition that had come to him.

For Bumps's mind had gone back to the murder film he had first taken in Miami. His keen brain fitted several odd angles together, and he was convinced this was not the real Choker with Jammer Cartnel. Bumps knew well enough The Skipper's uncanny ability to take the rôle of another.

So his heavy figure struck the girl with great force, jolting her light figure from her feet. She fell down, the automatic slipping from her hand. But she had fired its two last bullets.

Luckily for Captain Fury, the girl had not fired before she had spoken. Her words had given him the second of warning he had needed. Even without Bumps's interference, he possibly would have evaded the bullets, for he had dropped to the ground and rolled to one side.

But Bumps's collision with the girl had deflected the second shot. Jammer Cartnel cried out, groped out with his hands. He fell down with blood trickling from his forehead into his eyes.

Perhaps if the men commanded by the Choker had been given a moment to analyze the situation, they would have doubted their chief's ability to move with the darting speed displayed by Cap.

The Skipper leaped straight upon Bumps McCarthy. That amazed cameraman was fairly lifted from his feet by Cap's uppercutting fist. No doubt Bumps then thought, if he had time to think, that he had made a mistake about this man being The Skipper.

The cameraman went to his back, his eyes rolling. He shivered, and lay still. Behind him appeared the scarred face of Spike Briggs. In a split second, he would have emptied the pistol he held into his captain's body.

"Hold it, Spike!" gritted Cap. "An' take what happens!"

The first mate did not always think fast. This was one time his brain ignited on the first turn. He fired the automatic. Its crackling shots spat out. But the slugs came only within inches of Cap.

The Skipper fastened on his wrist, grated, "Play dead," and flipped Spike all the way over one shoulder.

Instantly, Cap turned toward his men. They were dashing toward him, guns in their hands. In the voice of the Choker, he commanded them.

"Put all of them aboard the sub! Go easy with the girl! I may want her!"

The Skipper put a great deal of relish into his last words. He watched two men pull the fighting girl away from Jammer Cartnel. Tarna Rodens had run over, and was kneeling beside the fallen man.

"JAMMER! Please, Jammer! Speak!" she was saying wildly. "I was a fool! I love you, not him! I've always loved you!"

"I'll teach the crazy, damned fool!" gritted Cap. "Put her on the sub with the others! Then you can come back to the wreck and break open a few bottles! I want to be alone for a while!"

The men obeyed the orders. They carried Jammer Cartnel and lowered him into the submarine. A similar service was performed for Bumps McCarthy, who was still out. They were compelled to push the screaming Tarna Rodens into the conning tower.

Cap was below as the girl was low-

ered. He caught her firmly by the wrists, and while the Choker's men still looked on, he kissed her roughly. The men chuckled and moved back toward the pirate wreck where bottles awaited them.

Tarna Rodens was shaking with rage, in which there still was no fear. Cap freed one of her wrists. She clawed instantly at his face.

And the black, stiff hair touched with gray, slipped from its place. Rusty locks fell over Cap's forehead. He worked his lips and bits of wax fell out. A hand rubbed, and the beaked nose was no longer there.

Tarna Rodens fell back, staring at him.

"Cap Fury, at your service, Miss Rodens," he said calmly. "Now scream! And make it sound like the real thing!"

Color suffused the golden-brown skin of the girl's face.

"It seems impossible——" she began, and then she screamed.

Tarna Rodens was quick; she understood. She screamed again; she let it gurgle in her throat, as if perhaps a choking hand had shut off her cry.

"Perfect, Miss Rodens," said Cap. "What they believe is happening will sweeten the liquor of the Choker's men. Now I would see to Jammer Cartnel, if I were you. He has earned the love of the world's best woman—and you don't rank far from it."

THE SKIPPER had not misjudged the Choker's men. Ribald merriment had broken out in the pirate wreck. Cap was in the conning tower of the Choker's submarine. He saw the man called the Preacher standing in the doorway of the wreck compartment. The Preacher had his face oddly twisted.

The lower jaw was both broken and dislocated.

Cap could hear the smashing of bottle necks. A grim smile lay across his broad mouth. Below him, he could see Tarna Rodens pillowing Jammer Cartnel's head. Cartnel's eyes had opened. He was smiling, as if he could see. The girl kissed him.

Cap's hands slid to the closing controls of the sub's conning hatch. He made sure this would work smoothly. He looked over the cay to where the small tower of the breathless death stood out in the afterglow following the rain squall.

And as he looked, a hooded and masked figure sprang from the mangroves. The real Choker had recovered his senses. He was running toward the small murder tower, shouting. Curses, commands boiled from his lips.

These brought his men from their drinking in the pirate wreck. They heard the Choker's voice, saw him still in his mask. The Skipper watched as one after another of the men seemed to get the idea they had been tricked.

The Preacher ran out toward the Choker, trying to call out. The jaw Spike had broken made his voice only a jabbering.

"Get back! Grab your masks!" shouted the real Choker. "I'll kill them all—all of them!"

Probably the Choker did not know much of what had happened. He must have believed his enemies to still be on the island. His men back-tracked into the pirate wreck. The Choker had a hand on a lever in the tower of the breathless death. He turned, waiting for his men to protect themselves with the oxygen masks.

The Preacher fell down, trying to get back. The Choker pulled another oxygen mask from under his coat and flung it to the man.

"Get it on! Get it on!"

The Choker was furious with rage. The Preacher was trying to explain, perhaps tell his chief what had happened. He could not form words with that loosely swinging jaw.

"What is it, Captain Fury? What is it?"

Tarna Rodens had come up beside him. She could see the Choker in his mask, hear his voice. Instantly, her beautiful face became masklike. Her wide, brown eyes were pools of implacable urge to kill.

"Now I'll——"

"Never mind," interrupted Cap quietly. "The end has come."

HIS right hand thrust through the conning hatch. A flat weapon like a pistol exploded. It was a rocket pistol. A smoking serpent wiggled high over the cay of the breathless death. It burst instantly into a showering cloud like green flame.

The Choker, ready to strike with the breathless death, waiting only for his men to be masked, stared upward. His men were rushing out. Some were running toward the submarine. Guns were in their hands.

None was sure how they had been tricked, but that they would soon discover.

As the rocket burst, The Skipper slid the conning hatch shut. With Tarna Rodens beside him, he dropped down to the sub's controls. His hands moved, and air started hissing from the submerging tanks.

The submarine sank slowly to the bottom of the channel. But before it had touched bottom, all the earth and sea seemed to have been caught by the rocking slap of a monster hand.

The Choker was beside his tower of the breathless death. His masked men were streaming toward the spot where the submarine had been sent under. All were converted into fragmentary parts. Their bodies were blown and shaken and dismembered like leaves before the wind of a hurricane.

Where the black spot of tarred earth had lain over the buried Manhattan meteor and its unknown element from another planet, or from the boundless laboratory of space itself, the middle of Blackbeard cay was split asunder. If the hooded mask had been off the murderous Choker, none would ever have identified him.

For the Choker and the Preacher had been blown into bits of flesh and bone. Like some of those who had died on the yacht of Royer Stannus in Biscayne Bay.

The meteor of whatever element it was composed, must have been shattered. Some had been driven deep into the sand. Some was hurled high in the air, to fall into the surrounding sea—an element that instantly robbed the air of all oxygen, then vanished.

The walls of the submarine protecting Cap and the others trembled, and the vessel shivered; but the plates held.

"Except for a few bits that will soon evaporate, the breathless death element has been destroyed," announced The Skipper solemnly. "And it was best those who employed it for murder should go with it."

"Yes, that was best," said Tarna Rodens in an awed voice.

At this time, in Cap's own streamlined submarine, Peter Doom took his hand from the radio control that had set off the terrific, high-powered explosive planted on the island. Through the periscope, Cap's men had got the rocket signal for the explosion, as it had been carefully planned by The Skipper.

ALL were back aboard the *Whirlwind*. The bewildered residents of Little Abaco Island had been returned to their homes. They never would fully understand from what horrible fate they had been rescued.

Governor Marbleday stood with others in the cabin of Captain Fury. New lines had been added to the executive's face.

"It is difficult to believe that Royer

Stannus himself was the Choker," said the governor. "The fiendish plan of having Tarna Rodens's brother serve as his double, then deliberately murdering him is incredible. But it gave Royer Stannus the chance to disappear and attempt to set up a dictatorship of terror. It is beyond credence, yet it must be true."

Captain Fury smiled.

"I guessed the truth when I first saw Bumps McCarthy's murder film from the wharf at Miami. Royer Stannus was sending Tarna Rodens's brother ashore as his double. Then Royer Stannus himself hid in a compartment on his own launch. A handkerchief was over his face, but it failed to conceal the identity with that big head of his. Sure that Royer Stannus was the murderer, and still alive, I employed my memory of his dead double's face to make up as the Choker."

"Jammer Cartnel is a brave man," said the governor, gravely.

"Yes," said Cap Fury. "He was almost, but not quite sure of the truth. You see, Cartnel was playing a deep game himself, getting in with Swank Paka and that crowd when he became sure they were in league with Royer Stannus."

The Skipper then explained how Jammer Cartnel had pretended to be drugged and had deliberately left Dude Stavano on the *Whirlwind*. But Royer Stannus trapped Cartnel, made him prisoner, then torpedoed the yacht *Petrel* to make it appear he was dead.

"I can see the twisted reasoning of Royer Stannus," admitted Governor Marbleday. "If his plot failed, he might have reappeared in his own identity and made it appear that he had been a prisoner, even that Cartnel was really the Choker."

"Exactly," agreed Cap Fury. "The greatest credit goes to Jammer Cartnel on all of this. All of us owe our lives to him."

"You do owe me something, Cap Fury," smiled Cartnel unexpectedly. "So, perhaps you will do me a favor? I call upon you to exercise your authority as master of a ship at sea."

"That is right," said Tarna Rodens. "If you do not marry us now, Captain Fury, he may be finding other trouble to keep us apart."

"Cartnel's only trouble probably will be political," smiled Governor Marbleday. "I mean looking after the duties of senator from our State.

Bumps McCarthy's rounded face wore a scowl.

He grunted to Peter Doom, "One of the few girls I've ever fallen for, and see what happens."

"As if any woman in her right senses would fall for a half-witted cameraman," rumbled Peter Doom.

THE END

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OLD SHIPS— *Some Rest in Peace, Others Wander Over the Seas*

OUT of the frozen north often come exciting tales about old, abandoned ships —ghost ships. Whalers off the Alaskan coast frequently tell of some vessel they have seen drifting below the vast ice floes. Sometimes these ships seem to be following a regular course, and imaginative seamen have sworn that they were manned by a crew. These vessels have often turned out to be ships abandoned in the Arctic by adventurers and explorers. The powerful, relentless currents many times carry them thousands of miles.

There was one case which happened near Baffin Island. A seaman sighted a vessel far across the ice floes. The ship was watched for several days and it appeared to be moving, under the control of a crew. Finally the seaman and others asked permission of the skipper to go across the ice and inspect the phantom-like ship.

It was a twelve-mile walk for the seamen across the treacherous ice of the frozen north. They climbed aboard the ghost ship and found—no one. The cabin doors were locked and bolted. The curious seamen battered down the doors. They found musty interiors which had obviously been abandoned hurriedly. Open bottles of wine were still on the table, and even glasses were still partly filled.

A few days later, the captain himself came over with half of his crew. The ghost ship turned out to be H. M. S. *Resolute* which had been abandoned over 1,000 miles away at Lancaster Sound. And here she was in the ice off Cape Mercy, at the entrance to Hudson Strait!

The ship had been carried 1,000 miles in fifteen months by the shifting currents of the Arctic. And, strangely, she was not damaged. She was fitted with a crew and brought to New London, a voyage which took forty days.

There is also the story of De Long and his failure to reach the pole. But the disaster which overtook his ship, the *Jeanette,* proved his theory. Years after this vessel met disaster off the Siberian coast, fragments of it were found following the currents off the southern tip of Greenland. Thus is illustrated the existence of regular currents in the Arctic Ocean.

The Hudson Bay Company trading ship *Baychimo* drifted for many years up and down the Alaskan coast. So regular was her appearance that superstitious whalers insisted that she was manned by a crew.

BUT now Washington has established a Naval historic museum for old ships. This will be located on the Potomac River, near the Navy Department building, and some of the old ships in the collection have grand tales woven around them.

One of them is the famous old fight-

ing ship *Constellation.* Completed near the end of the 18th century, she contained twenty-eight 24-pounders and twelve 12-pounders. Later, this battery proved to be too heavy and her armament was lightened. But the long career of the *Constellation* practically covers the life of the American Navy, from the old sailing craft to the modern dreadnaughts. She was built as a warning to other governments that the United States intended to protect her right on the high seas.

In later years the *Constellation* was refitted and assigned as a practice ship to the midshipmen of the Naval Academy. She was even used on their annual summer cruises. And even to-day the *Constellation* is used as a receiving ship at Newport. Her life history covers over 137 years!

Then there is Farragut's historical flagship, the *Hartford,* launched at the Boston Navy Yard in 1858. She was equipped with sixteen 9-inch-shell guns. During the Civil War, the *Hartford* was engaged in active fighting at New Orleans. And later, she was sent to Vicksburg. She was one of the first steam vessels of our navy.

THIS plan of bringing old navy vessels to Washington and mooring them permanently on the Potomac was first started by President Roosevelt seventeen years ago, when he was Assistant Secretary of the Navy. The vessels would be moored near the famous Titanic Memorial there, and among the historic ships available are this famous *Constellation* and the *Hartford,* already mentioned. Others are the *Olympia,* Dewey's flagship at Manila Bay; the yacht *America,* now at Annapolis; and the *Constitution* and the *Oregon.* But local sentiment will probably keep these last two at their home cities of Boston and Oregon.

Dewey's flagship, the *Olympia,* led the attack on the Spanish squadron in Manila Bay. She remained with the Asiatic squadron until 1898, when she was taken out of service and sent to the Boston Navy Yard. But later she was recommissioned and made flagship of the North Atlantic squadron. During the late World War she was a convoy for transports and even saw service with the Allies near Russia.

One of the interesting incidents concerning the *Olympia* took place in Sep-

tember, 1921. At that time she brought back the body of the Unknown Soldier. In the following year she went out of commission.

Another ship which will be presented with pride in this new historical spot for old ships is the famous yacht *America.* This vessel was a blockade runner during the Civil War, but was later sunk in a Florida river. She was found by naval officers, salvaged, later assigned to the Union Fleet. After this she was made a practice ship for the midshipment at Annapolis.

Sold at auction in 1873, the man who bought the *American* started a fund for giving the ship to the Naval Academy as a gift of the nation. With much pride, she is pointed to as the yacht which won the America's cup in British waters in 1851.

The study of old fighting ships is an intriguing pastime. Strange tales of adventure and mystery are often unfolded. They outrival the tales of many of our best fiction writers. And if you really want to hear some stories that will make your skin prickle, seek out some old salt who has been down to the sea in ships. He will have more stories in him than you could possibly read in months.

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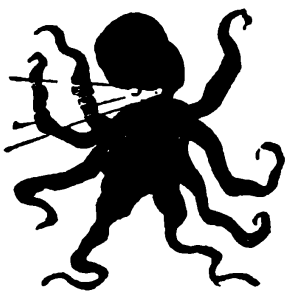

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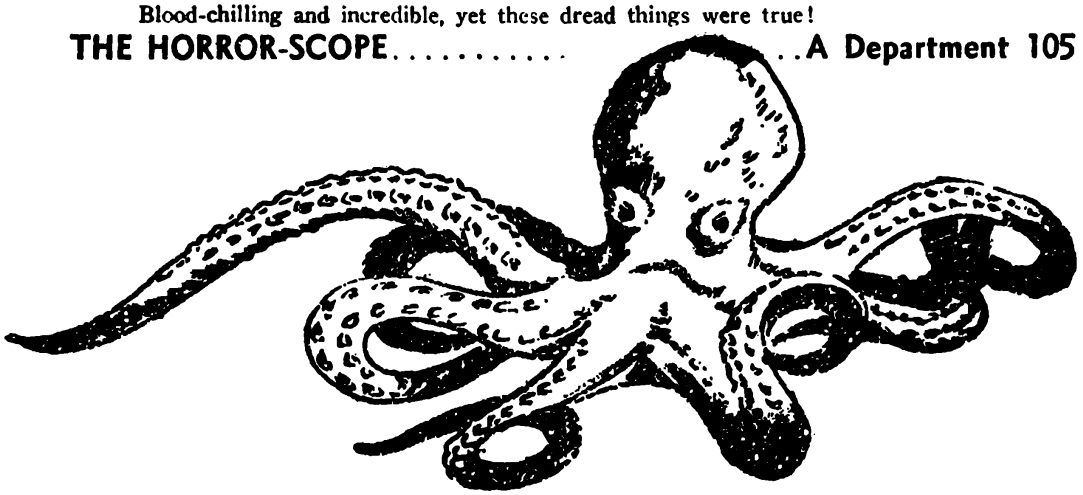

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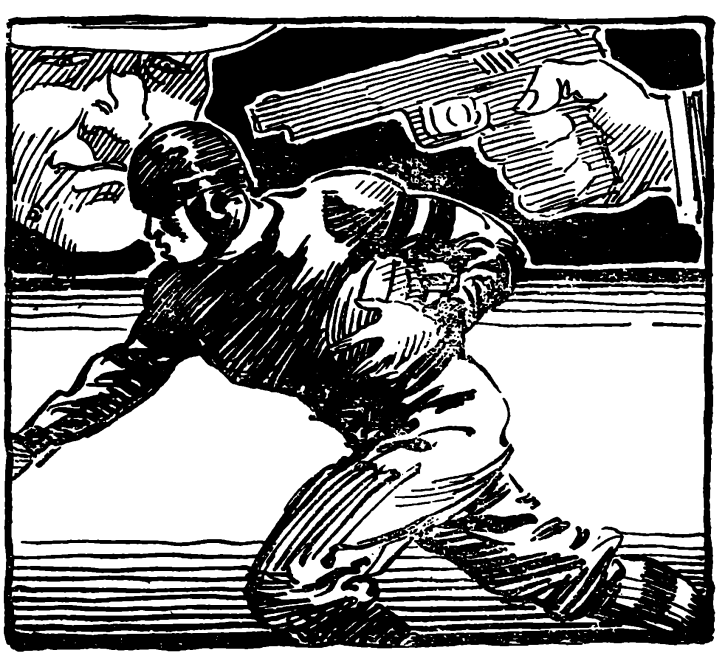

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